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THE DRAMATIS PERSONAE OF ALICE MUNRO

by

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Dramatis Personae of Alice Munro" submitted by Sister Claire L. Duteau in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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....

Date June 14 1973

For my father and mother

With much gratitude also to the Sisters of the Assumption who have so kindly sustained me throughout the studies leading to this Degree.

ABSTRACT

Alice Munro has created a world peopled with women whose lives are marked by the comic and the incongruous, the tragic, the cruel, the embarrassing, the obscene. (With only one exception — more apparent than real — the men are seen through women's eyes.) But though these people are individualized, independent, created masks, they are at the same time variant faces of the writer herself. In fact, the effectiveness of individual characters seems to depend on the extent to which we can perceive the author's participation in their presentation. We respond to the characters as if they were actual people but our response is complicated and enriched by our awareness of the presence of Alice Munro herself. It is not a matter of editorial intrusion such as mars Henry Fielding's art but of a mysterious synthesis which if a major problem for the critic is readily intuited by the sensitive reader. Though I have had to recognize this problem, it is bracketed out in my thesis in the interests of a clear, documented discussion of the characterization as variations of three roles: the role of the girl flowering (or being deflowered by circumstance) into woman, the role of the believer (seeking and finding no satisfactory grounds for her beliefs), and the role of the writer.

Though The Dance of the Happy Shades and Lives of Girls and Women exist on different levels, because the narrator-mask in the earlier work is singular and the narrator-mask in the latter work is compound, consisting of both Del Jordan and Alice Munro, I have disregarded this difference of status and treated the characters delineated as if they were from identical or analagous contexts.

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I

> The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word child; now it appeared that it was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become.[1]

> A house is not the same for a woman. She is not someone who walks into the house, to make use of it, and will walk out again. She is the house; there is no separation possible. (D-60)

> There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come. All women have had up till now has been their connection with men. All we have had. No more lives of their own, really, than domestic animals.[2]

More than anything else it is with the business of growing up feminine that Alice Munro is concerned. Her books, unlike much of the feminist polemic material on the market today, have a quality which is neither screeching nor self-pitying. They are set in a town called Jubilee, and, with all this name suggests, are a celebration of what the lives of girls and women are today. Their tone is not one of simple acquiescence. Central to Mrs. Munro's vision is the possibility of reacting, of situating oneself as a woman vis-à-vis the phenomena of modern life, of choosing to some extent within the various roles offered to women those elements not hopelessly unsuited to one's own ideals. "Believe me, I wish you luck in your life," says Bobby Sherriff to Del Jordan on the last page of the novel. Without reflecting that luck is indeed needed or without even commenting upon the oddity of her well-wisher — a young man on leave from the asylum, who is serving cake he has just made himself, and standing now on tiptoe "like a plump ballerina" — Del responds quietly. "'Yes,' I said, instead of thank you." Coming as it does at the end of the book, this yes can be taken to include the gains Del has made so far as well as her willingness to take on what life now has to offer. Having survived small-town Ontario, she awaits bigger things, her positive attitude a guarantee that she will be able to grow through them. Although Mrs. Munro protests that her characters are not based on people she knows, one suspects there is a great deal of herself in the girls she presents. Certainly, Jubilee is much like the town she grew up in, where a girl with ambitions had to hide them.

> In Wingham, Ontario, where I grew up I very early got the idea that I was pretty freaky. As far as Wingham was concerned, anyway. And that if I didn't hide this I would expose myself to ridicule, which is really the weapon of such communities. And so I began early to behave in a disguised way . . . . And then just gradually . . . I began to care less what people thought.[3]

The liberation of women by a force within themselves faces many pitfalls, but even as she portrays women who succumb to them, Alice Munro seems to be saying that things need not be this way. For every girl who, like the Helen of "Postcard," wastes her life waiting because her happiness is centered upon an unworthy man there could be a person like Del Jordan who anomalously refuses to be imprisoned in a role and welcomes life on her own terms. To understand the world of Alice Munro's girls, and how they fit into it, one must examine their ideas about parents and families, about the skills a female needs or is forced to acquire, and about sex.

I

Most of the mothers who appear in the short stories consider their children as burdens. The one in "Walker Brothers Cowboy" is the worried type, keeping her two children in the yard close to her, sorrowing for the time when she was prouder of her husband than she is now that he has become a travelling salesman, and frequently so exhausted that she must lie down to rest. She uses her children as an audience for her reminiscences and makes so many emotional claims upon them that they welcome the opportunity to leave home and accompany their father into the country. But when the father suggests that his bringing the children along will be restful for the mother, the girl who tells the story comments somewhat plaintively: "What is there about us that people need to be given a rest from?" (D-6) When the mother is sick as in "Images," the child is made to feel in the way. Domineering Mary McQuade will not allow a small girl to stay in the sickroom: "You been tiring your Momma out? What do you want to bother your Momma for on this nice day?" (D-33) With adolescence come the more serious adventures for which mothers must make amends. "An Ounce of Cure" tells the story of a girl who feels so "mortally depressed" (D-79) that she drinks the Berryman's whiskey while babysitting for them, disgracing herself and her family. Her mother replaces the liquor, and one can imagine that from April to July — the time it takes for the girl to make enough money to pay for the bottle — her despair at having a problem daughter must be frequently aired. In "The Time of Death" Leona Parry immediately assumes the role of victim, blaming Patricia for Benny's death, and insisting that the child be not allowed into her presence. By dramatizing her sorrow, Leona is trying to make people forget her neglect of house and children. She wants to be seen as a woman with no life of her own. "Boys and Girls" has both a grandmother and a mother wanting to make "a little lady" out of a girl who enjoys men's work, slams doors, and sits with her knees apart. The mother's nagging is suggested in the girl's comment that "the word girl . . . was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment." (D-119) The particular form of burden in this case is that of the daughter who will not fit a pattern. For an adult version, there is Helen in "Postcard" — the daughter who does not get married and set up an ordinary home. Her clandestine affair has been no secret to her mother, but has not been spoken of, and Helen is surprised to hear the tearful accusation: "I am an old woman but I know. If a man loses respect for a girl he doesn't marry her," (D-142) the implication being that Helen has caused her mother much secret sorrow. In "Red Dress — 1946" an awkward adolescent compares herself with a friend who is the confidently successful girl and might so much more easily satisfy maternal expectations. The mother slaves at giving her daughter a stylish appearance and waits up for her after school dances, expecting reports of social success. But the ugly duckling feels she can never be as "happy" as her mother wishes.

An unmarried mother with her own burden poses special problems — as does Hazel in "A Trip to the Coast." The old woman reads ads from the newspaper's Personal Columns to her daughter: "Man in prime of life desires friendship of healthy woman without encumbrances, send photograph first letter."

(D-179) May's query "What's encumbrances?" is all the more painful that the term is so obviously meant for her. With the last story in Dance of the Happy Shades, Alice Munro shows another type of burden — the ordeal of having to endure childish performances not only of one's own progeny but of the children of others. The extent to which mothers have to hide their true feelings during a musical recital is summed up in the narrator's observations that they "wore the dull, not unpleasant look of acquiescence, the touch of absurd and slightly artificial nostalgia which would carry them through any lengthy family ritual." (D-215) In all these cases mothers suffer because of their children, the resentment towards them growing more serious as they become older. Only with "The Office" is the desire for emancipation from them related to creativity. The mother who wishes also to be a writer cannot expect privacy in her home, where "the very thought of [shutting a door to her children] is outrageous to them." (D-60) A great variety of frustrations thus come to mothers through their children.

On the other hand, mothers themselves appear as burdens, continuing to live with their daughters and taking over their lives. Nora, who lives in a desolate farmhouse with her blind mother, ("Walker Brothers Cowboy") puts on a mask of cheerfulness for her visitors. One suspects, however, that the child who tells the story sees into the true nature of her life when she remarks that "In spite of the cleanness, . . . there is a faint sour smell — maybe of the dishrag or the tin dipper or the oilcloth, or the old lady . . ." (D-11) For Nora who works hard to keep her mother and herself alive, life has little zest and dreams have soured. The Momma of "Postcard" dominates in a more active and more despicable manner. She examines the wastepaper basket, monopolizes Clare's presence when he calls once a week, jokes with him about Helen, and manages many details of her daughter's life. The fact that she is called Momma shows in itself how well she has managed to keep Helen where she wants her. Lois in "Thanks for the Ride" is ashamed of her grandmother's undisguised lechery as well as of her mother's vulgar manners. The city boy who has picked her up for the evening describes her as she leaves her home with him.

> She began to laugh, and I had a glimpse of her mother in her, that jaggedness and hysteria. "Oh, my God!" she whispered. I knew she meant what had happened in the house, and I laughed too, not knowing what else to do. So we went back to the car laughing as if we were friends, but we were not. (D-52)

Even friendship seems inaccessible to a girl manacled to the ugly women who have imposed their way of life upon her.

The most flagrant example of the burdensome mother is that presented in "The Peace of Utrecht." Two daughters remember their adolescence as "a dim world of continuing disaster" (D-191) in which adult responsibilities were thrust upon them by their mother's infirmity. Despite the girls' efforts to keep her out of sight, she had become a legend in the town, and the narrator confides that when people spoke about her mother, she felt her "whole identity" that pretentious adolescent construction, come crumbling down." (D-194) The narrator herself has married, but for the past ten years her sister Maddy has kept a "vigil" beside the creature both sisters consider "a particularly tasteless sideshow." (D-195) Even now that the mother is dead she does not leave her daughters in peace, her death being only an unsettled treaty that will leave two women profoundly troubled for the rest of their lives.

Motherhood as it appears in the short stories engenders far more sorrows than joys. The mother-daughter tie is a mutually oppressive one marked by periodical crises and long-term anxieties which are shared in only a few cases with husband and father.

The male figure is absent or weak in the works of Alice Munro. Those of the short stories are typically violent or irresponsible men. In "A Trip to the Coast," the amateur hypnotist who causes the grandmother's death is reminiscent of May's father — a man who may have been just such a traveller passing through, not staying to accept the consequences of his act. In "The Shining Houses," there is another runaway — Mr. Fullerton, who merely walked off one day with a strange visitor, leaving no explanation to his wife. Even fathers who appear more loving are a kind of threat to family life. They share secrets with their children which must not be divulged to the mothers. In suggesting to his daughter that her mother could not cope with the bizarre story of old Joe Phippen, the father of "Images" is pointing out her inferiority. Both this story and "Walker Brothers Cowboy" show father and children leaving the mother behind with a real sense of relief. There is an ambiguous situation in "Boys and Girls," the young girl at first escaping housework by helping with the foxes and then, as though touched by her mother's squeamishness, feeling such repugnance for her father's work that she tries to prevent his killing an old mare. At first it is the mother who is the enemy.

> She was plotting . . . to get me to stay in the house more, although she knew I hated it (because she knew I hated it) and keep me from working for my father. It seemed to me she would do this out of perversity, and to try her power. (D-118)

Then comes rejection by the father, as if he were washing his hands of her. "He spoke with resignation, even good humour, the words which absolved and dismissed me for good. 'She's only a girl,' he said." (D-127) The father of "An Ounce of Cure" has apparently handed matters of discipline over to his wife, for he takes no position in the question of his daughter's misconduct. When a serious occasion arises, such as Benny's accident in "The Time of Death," the uselessness of men is especially felt.

> When the men came in — the father, a cousin, a neighbour, bringing a load of wood or asking shamefacedly for something to eat — they were at once aware of something that shut them out, that reproved them. They went out and said to the other men, Yeah, they're still at it. And the father who was getting a little drunk, and belligerent, because he felt that something was expected of him and he was not equal to it, it was not fair, said, Yeah, that won't do Benny any good, they can bawl their eyes out. (D - 92)

The father is consistently a marginal figure. Any support he does offer is of a temporary nature.

Turning to Lives of Girls and Women one finds a similar situation with Del Jordan's father. He rarely speaks, retiring into the background of his family's life with no resistance at all. He seems the very type of quiet unassuming man the domineering Mrs. Jordan would choose to father her children. His absenteeism, however, is no issue for Del. Besides, she has more of a father than any of her friends: both Naomi and Garnet have old, handicapped fathers, and Jerry Storey's has been dead for years. Alice Munro's fathers do not measure up to the one described by Simone de Beauvoir.

> Little by little [the young girl] realizes that if the father's authority is not that which is most often felt in daily affairs, it is actually supreme; it takes on more dignity from not being degraded to daily use; and even if it is in fact the mother who rules as mistress of the household, she is commonly clever enough to see to it that the father's wishes come first; in important matters the mother demands, rewards, and punishes in his name and through his authority. The life of the father has a mysterious prestige: the hours he spends at home, the room where he works, the objects he has around him, his pursuits, his hobbies, have a sacred character. . . . His work takes him outside, and so it is through him that the family communicates with the rest of the world: he incarnates that immense, difficult, and marvelous world of adventure; he personifies transcendence, he is God.[4]

Hardly any of this applies to Del's father, who unquestioningly allows his wife and children to move into a house in town, thereafter appearing fleetingly, and being quoted only a very few times, as Del recalls the events of her life. Mrs. Jordan never refers to her own father. Her brother Bill's childlessness, his apparent indifference to an imminent death, the unconcern with which he has accepted to be a mere "meal ticket" (L-90) for the almost lifeless Nile — all contribute to make of him a weak figure. Uncle Craig might be an exception here, but it is obvious that he is important only in the eyes of his sisters. To Del, who interprets her aunts' regard for his work as senseless conformity, he remains eccentric and ineffectual.

> It would have made no difference if [he] had actually had 'abstract intellectual pursuits' [like those of Natasha's husband in War and Peace] or if he had spent the day sorting henfeathers; they were prepared to believe in what he did . . . . They respected men's work beyond anything; they also laughed at it. This was strange; they could believe absolutely in its importance and at the same time convey their judgment that it was, from one point of view, frivolous, nonessential. And they would never, never meddle with it; between men's work and women's work was the clearest line drawn. (L-32).

Del does not share her aunt's awe for men's work; neither does she find it important enough to laugh at (as she does so noticeably at sex). If men impress her, it is mainly in their oddities. Mr. Chamberlain, with his pathetic exhibitionism, is not the person to make her change her mind. Jerry Storey, the intellectual man, Garnet French, the sensual one, are not objects of great mystery, Del managing with relative ease to overcome the threats they pose to her integrity. For Del, men are not formidable unless one makes them so. Watching her aunts degenerate, she observes that "this was what became of them when they no longer had a man with them, to nourish and admire." (L-60) It does not sound like the kind of risk Del would be likely to take. This girl, who has no substitute father and relates so little to the one she has, would puzzle both Freud and Simone de Beauvoir. The latter points out that "what Freud calls the Electra complex is not, as he supposes, a sexual desire; it is full abdication of the subject, consenting to become object in submission and adoration."[5] Del feels no need for her father's approbation. What he thinks of her either in one way or the other is of little importance. She notices that he treats her respectfully, that he does not joke with her as he does with girls of her age who have less education. "He approved of me and he was in some ways offended by me. Did he think my ambitiousness showed a want of pride?" (L-230) Because Mr. Jordan does not express feelings, his influence on his voluble daughter remains very small. The last mention she makes of him concerns his three favourite books, and these may well suggest what he is to her: a figure who was necessary in the past, a lone man involved in monotonous activities assuring a meager survival, a creature dwarfed by his wife. The books are H. G. Wells's Outline of History, Robinson Crusoe, and some pieces by James Thurber. Del observes curtly that her father reads these books "over and over again, putting himself to sleep. He never talked about what he read." (L-231) In every way this man seems closed to new ideas and he has little share in the type of person his daughter is making of herself. For example, there is an ironic contrast between his conventional defence of her in fraternal squabbles with the dull Owen (L-230) and her own lusty defence of herself in a physical struggle with Garnet (L-239) when she sees a menace to her real life.

Strangely enough, Del's family life is not unhappy. Harmony between her parents is something she takes for granted. Her desire that they express love for each other is balanced by the embarrassment she feels on the rare occasions where they do. (L-49) The security of her home contrasts to the violence which surrounds little Diane in Uncle Benny's house — and it is with this account of a child battered by her wild mother that Del begins the story of her own life. Diane is a pale, silent, and suspicious creature. "Touched or cuddled, she submitted warily, her body giving off little tremors of dismay, her heart beating hard like the heart of a bird if you capture it in your hand." (L-18) In direct contrast to the haphazardness of Diane's life — as so well illustrated by her mother's plunge into a grotesque marriage with Uncle Benny and her disappearance shortly afterwards — is the solidity of Del's own family.

> My mother sat in her canvas chair and my father in a wooden one, they did not look at each other. But they were connected, and this connection was plain as a fence, it was between us and Uncle Benny, us and the Flats Road, it would stay between us and anything.

Del feels the strength this gives her when her parents on winter evenings play cards together and she is in bed.

> Upstairs seemed miles above them, dark and full of the noise of the wind. Up there you discovered what you never remembered down in the kitchen — that we were in a house as small and shut-up as any boat is on the sea, in the middle of a tide of howling weather. They seemed to be talking, playing cards, a long way away in a tiny spot of light, irrelevantly; yet this thought of them, prosaic as a hiccough, familiar as breath, was what held me, what winked at me from the bottom of the well as I fell asleep. (L-26)

The haven provided by her parents is not superflous support. Just as surely as Diane is battered by her mother, so Del will be torn by the pains of growing.

It is Mrs. Jordan who plays the central role in Del's development. This well-meaning person is taken up with a variety of interests but the modernistic ideas she spouts are based on such fragile ground that she frequently appears ridiculous. Her absentmindedness allows Del a fair amount of liberty and her disregard for convention, while it sometimes makes her daughter squirm, is no doubt related to the boldness which characterizes much of Del's approach to life. The two rarely engage in intimate conversation and yet time and again Del quotes her mother, usually disagreeing with her opinions and yet feeling much more at home in their intensity than in the righteousness of her aunts' attitudes. Del senses that behind the energumen in her mother, there is a rather vulnerable woman. When the aunts point out failings such as an unironed blouse, Del tries to explain her ambivalent feelings to herself.

> I felt the weight of my mother's eccentricities, of something absurd and embarrassing about her — the aunts would just show me a little at a time — land on my own coward shoulders. I did want to repudiate her, crawl into favour, orphaned, abandoned, in my wrinkled sleeves. At the same time I wanted to shield her. She would never have understood how she needed shielding from two old ladies with their mild bewildering humour, their tender proprieties. (L-64)

Mrs. Jordan's love of knowledge, undigested though it be, will eventually appeal more strongly to Del than the aunts' perfect house where reigns over everything "the clean, reproachful smell of wax and lemons."

Independent herself, Mrs. Jordan knows better than to impose her views on Del, who is thus free not only to associate with the objectionable Naomi and the equally dangerous Garnet but to read books her mother does not approve of as well as to explore what the various churches of Jubilee have to offer. The period of inordinate respect for her mother is a short one in Del's life. Fittingly, it is expressed in a garbled image of antiquity.

> When I was younger, at the end of the Flats Road, I would watch her walk across the yard to empty the dishwater, carrying the dishpan high, like a priestess, walking in an unhurried, stately way, and flinging the dishwater with a grand gesture over the fence. Then, I had supposed her powerful, a ruler, also content. She had power still, but not so much as perhaps she thought. And she was in no way content. Nor a priestess. (L-80)

Mrs. Jordan sets out upon strange crusades. How can she stimulate the intellectual life of Jubilee when she herself has such a shallow education? How can she give credibility to her ideas about male domination when her own husband is so mild and affable? Yet, from her mother's very zeal, Del learns discretion. There are ways of being assertive, and noting the scorn her mother receives, Del comments: "I myself was not so different from [her], but concealed it, knowing what dangers there were." (L-81) At least, Mrs. Jordan is not guilty of what would for Del be the unpardonable sin: attempting to make of her daughter a simperingly feminine doll. Del has decided that her mother's "virginal brusqueness" (L-180) will not do for her. She is not the girl to say it, but she might be grateful that her mother has not pushed her into one of the alternatives: to become, as the song suggests, "as soft and as pink as a nursery" (L-180).

An examination of Alice Munro's use of colour shows that she shares Del's aversion for pink — or more importantly, for all the prettily feminine associations that go with this colour. At a party her mother gives, Del appears briefly as the sweet sugar-and-spice girl. But even as she describes herself, she seems to repudiate the role, so out of character for her. "In a pink wool skirt and bolero, I joyfully passed peanuts." (L-72) So consistently does Alice Munro use pink for unpleasant features that one can see, in the use she makes of it, an implied rejection of the stereotyping to which little girls are subjected.

In "Thanks for the Ride" the narrator is repelled by his cousin George's "tender blond piggish handsomeness" and "the nudity of his pink mouth." George echoes this description of himself when he complains about the scarcity of girls: "Any other town I ever been, . . . pigs hangin' out the windows, practically hangin' off the trees." With this image of pink carcasses suspended for the taking, the reader is prepared for the type of sexual adventure over which George will preside.

Mrs. Malley, in "The Office," encases her swollen feet in "pink feather slippers" but in this story it is her husband, he of the sick imagination, for whom the colour is used most subtly. A portrait shows him "looking pre-eminently prosperous, rosy and agreeable." Among the gifts with which he tries to ingratiate himself with the narrator are a potted plant "wrapped lavishly in pink and silver foil" and a garish teapot "covered with gilt and roses." His unmanly gifts say much about his character.

It is not difficult to imagine Leona Parry's House ("The Time of Death") after she appears with "her kimona fallen open reveal[ing] her lean chest, her wilted breasts with their large blue veins sloping into the grey-pink nightgown." In this context, pink hardly suggests freshness.

Pink phlox greets Maddy's sister in "The Peace of Utrecht" when she arrives for her painful and long overdue visit. Unpleasant flowers, their scent too strong for "the hot air of a closed house on a summer afternoon." And the broken cut-glass bowl with which this story ends is also pink. Not white or red but just in between. Like the unspoken feelings between the two sisters, like Maddy's own predicament. For she is free now, yet not free, imprisoned in a memory-filled house with "a whole shelf full of glass bowls. Enough glass bowls to do me the rest of my life." While Maddy moans "Why can't I?" to her sister's urging that she leave to find her own life elsewhere, the shattered glass at her feet both suggests her broken girlhood dreams and, in its colour, reflects the ambiguities of her situation.

To close this gallery of pink sadnesses there is poor old Miss Marsalles to whom such begrudging loyalty is granted by her piano students and their mothers. She is the last character to appear in Dance of the Happy Shades and it is her story that gives the book its title. Like some ancient character out of past ages she greets her unwilling guests in "a floor length dress of plum and pinkish splotches that might have been made out of upholstery material." An unhealthy pink to be sure, it is used appropriately for Miss Marsalles, the weak old lady no longer strong enough to survive in a flashy suburbanite world where youth alone has rights. Does she personify what must some day happen to all the little pink girls so proudly bedecked by their mothers?

By using pink in a context of ugliness — be it for gross sensuality, prurience, sordidness, stifling demesticity, or lack of taste — Alice Munro mocks the whole idea of frail femininity. Woman deceives herself if she expects special treatment. And Del Jordan is justified in cringing when she hears that a girl must make herself "as soft and as pink as a nursery" if she wants to be happy.

2

For Alice Munro the feminine skills of housekeeping, cooking, sewing and beauty culture need not be regarded as enslaving drudgery; only foolish girls such as Naomi and her friends become bogged down in these areas; only dried out spinsters like the aunts use proficiency in these skills as a gauge for evaluating women. Certain characters in the short stories struggle with the domestic aspect of their lives, but Del Jordan and her mother seem to have decided that overly meticulous housekeeping is a waste of human effort. They would agree with Simone de Beauvoir's comment that "few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition."[5] And they want to learn more than what the kitchen has to offer.

> Each day the kitchen teaches . . . patience and passivity; here is alchemy; one must obey the fire, the water, wait for the sugar to melt, for the dough to rise, and also for the wash to dry, for the fruits to ripen on the shelf.[7]

For Del certainly, the refusal to subjugate herself to household tasks bears with it implications of sexual freedom such as that referred to by Simone de Beauvoir in ascribing to a popular belief.

> It is noteworthy that the rage for cleanliness is highest in Holland, where the women are cold, and in puritanical civilizations, which oppose an ideal of neatness and purity to the joys of the flesh. If the Mediterranean Midi lives in a state of joyous filth, it is not only because water is scarce there; love of the flesh and its animality is conducive to toleration of human odor, dirt and even vermin.[8]

In discussing the role of the housewife, Betty Friedan draws certain parallels between the suburban house and the German concentration camp. She says that "the comfortable concentration camp that American women have walked into, or have been talked into by others, is . . . a frame of reference that denies woman's adult human identity."[9] Alice Munro suggests the same thing with aunts who engage in "morning marathons" of house and, garden work; who spend their afternoons attacking cherries, peas and apples with "marvellous, almost vindictive speed" (L-32) only on other occasions to jump in the hay with as much abandon as the twelve-year-old Del. (L-50) They do not use their domestic skills to express love but rather to trap people — as they do with the young city lawyer who has married a neighbour girl and whose manners they ridicule after they have invited him in for what appears a gracious tea party. (L-37) The baking and sewing they do for the Jordan family serves both to keep their brother dependent upon them and to point out the deficiencies of his wife. (L-59) Thus, the prison to which they have committed themselves is a means to ensnare others.

The housekeeping habits of a woman are used by Alice Munro as a key to character and situation. It is very possible that Mrs. Parry's grimy house ("The Time of Death") and her husband's drinking are interrelated. The neighbour, Allie McGee, who is a childless woman with time to follow radio serials, has the neat and tastefully decorated house which makes Patricia Parry despair at the conditions of her own home. Del Jordan watches for clues in the area of housekeeping. She notes that Jerry Storey's mother is rather fastidious, for in her home "the dishtowels were folded and ironed like the finest linen handkerchiefs and kept in a lemon-scented drawer." (L-201) Del often expresses the contrast between her mother and her aunts in terms of the households of each.

> I too with some slight pangs of disloyalty exchanged my mother's world of serious skeptical questions, endless but somehow disregarded housework, lumps in the mashed potatoes, and unsettling ideas, for theirs of work and gaiety, comfort and order, intricate formality. (L-37)

As they become older, the women in Del's life become more entrenched in their habits. Del returns from late sessions with Garnet to find her mother

> sitting up in bed, . . . her cup of tea gone cold on the table beside the bed, along with the other cups of tea abandoned earlier in the day or the day before — sometimes they sat there till the milk in them soured. (L-231)

How different this is from the aunts' house. After they move into town especially, these two old ladies have time to indulge in extremes of neatness.

> They wore dark cotton dresses with fresh, perfectly starched and ironed white lawn collars, china flower brooches. Their house had a chimney clock, which delicately marked the quarter hours; also watered ferns, African violets, crocheted runners, fringed blinds, and over everything the clean, reproachful smell of wax and lemons. (L-64)

Del is not accustomed to such refinements. Her training in the housekeeping arts has extended from shovelling winter sidewalks (L-82) to cleaning up the Flats Road house when her father and Uncle Benny let dirt go too far. And her heart is never in domestic work.

> I would scrub the floor and clean the windows and throw out mouldy food and line the cupboards with fresh paper, working with an aggrieved and driven air. (L-230)

Del will conform to some of her aunts' "ornate customs" but not without the feeling that it is beneath her to respect certain rules of their "tiny sealed-off country."

> In the bathroom, over the toilet, hung their old reproof, done in cross-stitch —
>
> Freshen the air before you leave
> A courtesy others will perceive
>
> A container with fresh matches hung beneath it. I always felt ashamed, caught out, reading that, but I always lit a match. (L-60)

Later on, Del is amused when her mother measures people by their neatness. The Combers have turned out to be too much for Mrs. Jordan, and she retaliates by reporting that

> there had been an unpleasant smell in their house . . . and the toilet . . . was hideous, scummy yellow. What good is it if you read Plato and never clean your toilet? asked my mother, reverting to the values of Jubilee. (L-74)

Del herself remains clear-headed about these values, and assigns more weight to human considerations than to order and the sterility which so often accompanies it. Thus she can overlook the general disorder of Garnet's home to revel in the joy and good-natured fun of his family. The flood water marks on the walls surprise her and she questions the taste of decorating walls with magazine pictures of "ladies in lovely ethereal dresses advertising sanitary napkins," (L-224) but she enjoys the closeness of the Frenches and remembers her visit affectionately: "There is no denying I was happy in that house." (L-226) Del, ready to forgive lapses in housekeeping, feels pity for Naomi whose energies turn to starched doilies (L-234), to the number of threads per square inch in sheets (L0182) and to "showers, linen and pots and pans and silverware." (L-194) To become versed in homemaking holds no attraction for Del, who says about Naomi's new interests: "Where she was going I did not want to go." (L-182)

Alice Munro is not concerned only with mocking the idea that fulfillment can be achieved through housekeeping, for she knows that many women use their arts as a weapon. By showing women who enclose themselves and their families in small world of their own making, she accuses them of fostering selfishness, and other forms of inhumanity. In "The Shining Houses" Mary sees the drapes of living-room windows drawn so that "cascades of flowers, of leaves, of geometrical designs, shut off these rooms from the night." (D-29)

It is the men of her community who are directly responsible for the expropriation of Mrs. Tupperton, for they have asked the municipality to put a lane through, but their wives construct the nests where such plots are hatched. Behind the gracious curtains develops the kind of ruthlessness which has made it possible to decide that Mrs. Tupperton is an undesirable. Another example of the manipulation by which human beings are made to fit into the landscapes devised by feminine minds is provided in "Sunday Afternoon." Here the maid Alva is considered just another fixture in Mrs. Gannett's household. "The uniform had belonged to Jean and Alva had asked, the first time she tried it on, if maybe it was too big; but Mrs. Gannett did not think so. The uniform was blue, the predominant kitchen colour." (D-164) No one looks at Alva as she carries out her duties. As a person she does not count. Like Mrs. Tupperton, she is one of the victims wealthier women make as they strive for stylishness.

Many of Alice Munro's unhappy women live in sordid homes which reflect their disinterest in life. The living quarters which adjoin the store in "A Trip to the Coast" are filled with a hodgepodge of shabby furniture. Everything is neglected and on the walls are "old photographs that smelled of hot oilcloth and old women's woollen stockings." (D-173) As in "Thanks for the Ride" where Lois's date is struck with an impression of staleness and decay, smell is emphasized to suggest the dullness of a life without promise.

> I noticed the smell in the house, the smell of stale small rooms, bedclothes, frying, washing, and medicated ointments. And dirt though it did not look dirty. . . . I noticed an old woman, the grandmother probably, standing in the doorway of the room. She was not thin like the others, but as soft and as shapeless as a collapsed pudding, pale brown spots melting together on her face and arms, bristles of hairs in the moisture around her mouth. Some of the smell in the house seemed to come from her. It was a smell of hidden decay, such as there is when some obscure little animal has died under the verandah. (D-50-51).

Old Joe Phippen himself, whose house smells of "coal oil, urine, earth and stale heavy air," (D-40) might be surprised to enter Lois's home, for he would not think of bringing a woman into his dark and dirty hide-out.

Alone, he does not mind living like an animal in a hole in the ground — "'But if you're married, that's another story.'" Joe believes that a woman would transform the surroundings, her housekeeping activities giving her the occasion to control life around her. "Images" provides a striking example of a woman who does this in Mary McQuade, who invades the home where she has come to care for the sick, "rearrang[ing] things to suit herself . . . let[ting] her power loose in the house." (D-33) But Joe Phippen's imagined wife and the overpowering Mary do not appear in those women for whom life is merely something to be endured.

Slavery to household tasks can suggest a more important surrender, as it does for Malley's wife in "The Office." This woman is seen, in the first glimpse the narrator gets of her, as a chained person, "dragging a vacuum cleaner, and pushing it with her foot." (D-61) It is clear also that more than material duties are involved.

> She had the swaying passivity, the air of exhaustion and muted apprehension, that speaks of a life spent in close attention on a man who is by turns vigorous, crotchety and dependent . . . . I [thought] that she would have no children, the stress of her life, whatever it was, did not allow it. (D-62)

Having submerged her personality in that of her husband, the woman is doomed to barrenness. She has neither children nor books such as those the narrator wishes to produce. Yet her life is acceptable to her husband, who suggests it is not "normal for a young woman, says she has a husband and kids, to spend her time rattling away on a typewriter." (D-70) Malley, of course, is a deranged man, not normal enough to recognize what he has done to his wife and too insensitive to grant privacy to those around him. But even in more average homes, women can find that they pay too little attention to themselves. The adolescent of "An Ounce of Cure" senses this.

> At home the life of the emotions . . . always seemed to get buried under the piles of mending to be done, the ironing, the children's jigsaw puzzles and rock collections. It was the sort of house where people were always colliding with one another on the stairs and listening to hockey games and Superman on the radio. (D-79)

Through all of these allusions to the housekeeping arts, Alice Munro appeals for feminine rights just as effectively as any strident reformer.

With her many references to cooking, she has a few specific things to say about the woman seen as sustainer of physical life. Typically, Del Jordan is against the frilly operations performed on food and is annoyed at thinking that she will have to "cut the crusts off sandwiches and make radish roses and carrot curls" for Naomi's shower. (L-233) She is amused at Bobby Sherriff who presents lemonade complete with mint leaves and maraschino cherries, then fusses over her, disparaging his qualities as cook and host. (L-250) Del's own tastes run to strong foods. Her "favourite, surreptitious breakfast" is made up of "puffed wheat drowned in black molasses." (L-45) And her response to opera is so vital that it leaves her famished.

> Opera made me hungry. When it was over I went into the kitchen and made fried-egg sandwiches, stacks of soda-crackers held together with honey and peanut butter, and a rich, secret, sickening mixture of cocoa, corn syrup, brown sugar, coconut and chopped walnuts, which had to be eaten with a spoon. Greedy eating first appeased then made me gloomy, like masturbating. (L-184)

She loses her interest in food during the passionate affair with Garnet, but when she renounces him after the struggle in the river, she tries to compensate fiercely.

> I went out to the kitchen, turned on the light, and made myself a big mixture of fried potatoes and onions and tomatoes and eggs, which I ate greedily and sombrely out of the pan. (L-241)

Copious meals express exuberance or intensity of emotion for Del, but they can have another effect. When Aunt Moira calls on the aunts, they offer her elaborate concoctions of their own making in exchange for tasty scandals about life in Porterfield. They need tales of outside misery to keep up the illusion that they themselves are happy. Moira is served freshly baked biscuits and complicated candies (L-41) while the aunts, like hungry vultures, thrive on the decay of other lives. The abundance they have to offer is not that of experience but of their victories over raisins, yeast, and coconut; they barter it gleefully for Moira's stories that "spread out over the day, over the yard, like black oil." Not very admirable but certainly more vibrant than the meals tossed at Naomi's father.

> When her mother was away, as now, Naomi would open a can of spaghetti and dump it out on a plate, for his dinner. I would say, "Aren't you going to heat it?" and she would say, "Why bother? He wouldn't know the difference anyway." (L-77)

Just as a frugal meal can indicate a dead relationship, so too much abundance can have sinister implications. Del is uncomfortable during Uncle Bill's extravagant shopping spree, (L-85) wondering at the motive of such lavishness. He will not buy back her mother's affection with gifts of groceries any more than he will cheat death by gorging himself. But juxtaposing the two efforts emphasizes the futility of each. Bill's attempts to affirm himself have much the same effect as the rich tables spread for Uncle Craig's funeral. Food, after all, is a reminder to man that he is frail. And there is pathos involved in the flaunting of prosperity which is part of the feast laid out by the ladies of Jenkin's Bend. (L-52)

Clothing, that other central preoccupation of women, is referred to frequently throughout the stories and the novel. Many of Mrs. Munro's girls are aware that dress is costume, and they sometimes feel uneasy about the role it forces them into. The narrator of "Boys and Girls," for example, tells of dreams becoming less altruistic.

> A story might start off in the old way, with a spectacular danger, a fire or wild animals, and for a while I might rescue people; then things would change around, and instead, somebody would be rescuing me. It might be a boy from our class at school, or even Mr. Campbell, our teacher, who tickled girls under the arms. And at this point the story concerned itself at great length with what I looked like — how long my hair was, and what kind of dress I had on; by the time I had these details worked out the real excitement of the story was lost. (D-126)

Certain girls oppose their mothers' efforts to remake them in their own images. Outcasts like Myra in "Day of the Butterfly" wear adult clothes made over, but the aggressive Gladys Healey of the same story has a wardrobe bought for her.

> Mr. Healey ran a Dry Goods and Ladies' Wear, and his daughter's leadership in our class was partly due to her flashing plaid skirts and organdie blouses and velvet jackets with brass buttons, but also to her early-maturing bust and the final brutal force of her personality. (D-102)

The child of "Walker Brothers Cowboy" resents her mother's impositions.

> [My mother] is making clothes for me against the opening of school. She has ripped up for this purpose an old suit and an old plaid wool dress of hers, and she has to cut and match very cleverly and also make me stand and turn for endless fittings, sweaty, itching from the hot wool, ungrateful. (D-5)

She feels that her identity is being attacked and that she is becoming an extension of her mother: "She walks serenely . . . with me her creation, wretched curls and flaunting hair bow, scrubbed knees and white socks — all I do not want to be." On the other hand, girls are quickly converted to the clothes ethic and are sensitive to what their mothers wear. The daughter of "Red Dress — 1946" feels ashamed of her mother's appearance.

"Around the house she wore no corset or stockings, she wore wedge-heeled shoes and ankle socks." (D-148) Even Del Jordan, for whom clothes is of little importance, considers it when she evaluates her mother. "She wore a terrible mannish navy blue suit, with a single button at the waist, and a maroon-coloured felt hat, her best, on which I agonizingly believed I could see a fine dust." (L-80) It is a mark of her independence that Del can laugh at the "dreadful purply-wine coloured taffeta" dress (L-197) she has to wear, and she is perspicacious enough to see that Naomi sacrifices individuality when she adopts the dress style of her companions in order to be accepted in the office world. This is the brand of stereotyping referred to by Marshall McLuhan in Understanding Media.

> The uniform ranks of the fashionable lady typists made possible a revolution in the garment industry. What she wore, every farmer's daughter wanted to wear, for the typist was a popular figure to enterprise and skill. She was a style-maker who was also eager to follow styles. As much as the typewriter, the typist brought into business a new dimension of the uniform, the homogeneous, and the continuous that has made the typewriter indispensable to every aspect of mechanical industry.[10]

Dressing uniformly bears with it the risk of appearing slightly less human, as do Maddy's friends in "The Peace of Utrecht," that company of lonely women who gather for noisy parties. "They wore resolutely stylish though matronly clothes, which tended to swish and rustle over their hard rubber corsets, and they put perfume, quite a lot of it, on their artificial flowers." (D-192)

Lois in "Thanks for the Ride" works hard to accumulate the pieces of her wardrobe. And she makes a sad picture as she boasts drunkenly: "I've got an imitation cashmere sweater at home. It cost me twelve dollars,' she said. 'I've got a fur coat I'm paying on, paying on for next winter. I've got a fur coat —'" (D-55) The emptiness of her life is just as obvious as that of Miss Farris, the Jubilee teacher whose life blooms only during the preparation of the annual operetta. This lady is greatly concerned with clothes, which she makes herself, producing quaint costumes sure to attract attention. "She wore high necks and long chaste sleeves, or peasant drawstrings and rickrack, or a foam of white lacy frills under the chin and at the wrists."(L-122) Her bitterness is only better disguised than Lois's, however, for she commits suicide a few years later.

Del Jordan is no seamstress, and girl talk about care of clothing makes her fear she is lacking in femininity.

> I would sit there thinking how grubby my sweater was and that my hair was greasy and my brassiere discoloured, one strap held on with a safety pin. I would have to get away, but when I got home I would not sew my brassiere-strap on or wash my sweater. Sweaters I washed always shrank, anyway, or the neckline sagged; I knew I did not take enough trouble with them but I had a fatalistic feeling that they would shrink or sag whatever I did. (L-180)

Whether it is being bought, made, washed, or shown off, clothing is an important manner in which a woman tells the world who she is. It can mark a communion, as even the disgruntled daughter of "Boys and Girls" perceives when she admits that her mother must love her, since she works "late at night making a dress of the difficult style I wanted." (D-117) That women usually make a more pernicious use of clothing than this woman does appears abundantly in Alice Munro's works.

Beauty care with its million intricacies is no less important than clothing to girls about to take their place in a competitive world. Before her mother's mirror, Del Jordan, like so many dreaming adolescents, transforms herself into a seductive beauty.

> I looked at my high round forehead, pink freckled skin, my face as innocent as an egg, and my eyes managed to alter what was there, to make me sly and creamy, to change my hair, which was light brown, fine as a crackling bush, into rich waves more gold than muddy. (L-153)

Later she surrenders to the fallacies of a transformation which is not merely imagined when she ventures into Naomi's world by accepting an invitation to the Gay-la dance hall.

> I had done my best; I had washed, shaved, deoedorized, done up my hair. I wore a crinoline, harsh and scratchy on the thighs, and a long-line brassiere that was supposed to compress my waist but which actually pinched my midriff and left a little bulge beneath that I had to tighten my plastic belt over. I had the belt pulled in to twenty-five inches, and was sweating underneath it. I had slapped makeup like paint over my throat and face; my mouth was as red, and nearly as thickly painted, as an icing-flower on a cake. (L-186).

These laborious efforts to appear a woman of the world extend to drinking imprudently, and as Del nurses her next day's indisposition, she decides that the prize for all these discomforts is too small. The "complicated feminine order" one must engage in to obtain a man and marriage is so full of duplicity and artifice that the alternative of an intellectual and even celibate life appears more attractive. "I was not going to be able to do it. No. Better Charlotte Brontë." (L-194) However, magazines issue a challenge which lesser girls than Del may not be able to ignore. In the presence of such articles as "Femininity — It's Making a Comeback!" and quizzes entitled "Is Your Problem That You're Trying to Be a Boy?", her nervousness is a humorous but vivid reminder of the pressures imposed upon women. When "a famous New York psychiatrist, a disciple of Freud"(L-180) says that women think about washing their hair when they look at the moon, anyone who does not has to feel guilty. The figure of Nile — Alice Munro's reverse Cleopatra — gives Del another measure for herself. She is too impressed to notice that the companion of the dying Uncle Bill is something of a corpse herself.

> Her skin is without a mark, like a pink teacup, her mouth could have been cut out of burgundy-coloured velvet, and pasted on. Her smell was inhumanly sweet and her fingernails — I saw this with shock, delight, and some slight misgiving, as if she might have gone too far — were painted green, to match her clothes. (L-84)

Nile's every word appears a "little colourless pebble" to Del, who observes that "she reached some extreme of feminine decorativeness, perfect artificiality, that I had not even known existed; seeing her, I understood that I would never be beautiful." (L-87) Del's naïve dismay is a fine way of mocking the expenditures of female energy which cosmetics entail.

In their attitudes toward the feminine skills — whether these concern care of the home or of the person —Alice Munro's female characters embody various ways of being a woman.

3

The mystery of sex compels much curiosity, and the joys and sorrows of Mrs. Munro's adolescents very often depend on a discovery of their own physiology or on their relationships with boys and men.

The female body itself is viewed with both attraction and revulsion. There is pride in being a woman, as even the worried girl of "Red Dress — 1946" feels when she notices herself. "I saw how my breasts, in their new stiff brassiere jutted out surprisingly, with mature authority, under the childish frills of the collar." (D-152) But one must endure the "curse" of menstruation which limits girls and exposes them to ridicule when "that little extra gush of blood, little bonus that no Kotex is going to hold . . . trickles horrifyingly down the inside of the thigh." (L-179) A woman's body loses its grace, with mothers developing "lumpy legs" (D-116) and old ladies collapsing into soft, shapeless puddings (D-51) or hardening into gnarled creatures like May's grandmother.

> She was all flat and narrow, except for the little mound of her stomach like a four-months' pregnancy that rode preposterously under her skinny chest. She had knobby fleshless legs and her arms were brown and veined and twisted like whips. Her head was rather big for her body and with her hair pulled tightly over her skull she had the look of an under-nourished but maliciously intelligent baby. (D-175)

Childbirth can be a torture, as Del imagines when she pictures her uncle holding his wife's "heavy, vein-riddled legs together while she heaved and tried to deliver." (L-40) Women are subject to particularly loathsome diseases.

> It seemed to me that the gloom spreading out from Aunt Moira had a gynecological odour, like that of the fuzzy, rubberized bandages on her legs. She was a woman I would recognize now as a likely sufferer from varicose veins, hemorrhoids, a dropped womb, cysted ovaries, inflammations, discharges, lumps and stones in various places, one of those heavy, cautiously moving, wrecked survivors of the female life, with stories to tell. (L-40)

Even healthy women may offend. When dancing with Nora, the child of "Walker Brothers Cowboy" feels embarrassed by the "warmth and bulk" of her partner's breasts. (D-17) One of the guests at Miss Marsalles's recital also has an unpleasant bosom. "Mrs. Clegg leans across us letting loose a cloud of warm unfresh odour from between her breasts." (D-219) The notoriously clean Auntie Grace herself has "a faint sour smell" under her eau de cologne. (L-53) There is Fern Dogherty, of course, whose joyful sensuality makes her at home in her body ("She had a ruby-coloured satin dressing gown, a gorgeous garment, fruitily moulding, when she sat down, the bulges of her stomach and thighs ") (L-144), but to young girls, the whole complicated structure appears alarming. Del always wears pyjamas because they "decently shroud and contain" the "vile bundle" between her legs. (L-145)

The specifically genital is explored and experienced in detail as Del Jordan passes from nervous research with Naomi to surprisingly unemotional experiences with Mr. Chamberlain and eventual discovery and release with Garnet. She cannot count on her mother for information or advice. Mrs. Jordan writes to newspapers about birth control for poor families but will not discuss sex with her daughter and considers Naomi's "sexual preoccupation" a menace. For her, there is no difference between romance, vulgarity, and sex — which are severely classified as "nonsense." (L-147) It may be Mrs. Jordan's matter-of-factness which causes Del to conclude that "the itchy hot play of sex belonged to childhood, and was outgrown by decent adults, who made their unlikely connection only for the purpose of creating a child." (L-90)

Discussions between Del and her friend are carried out in what she calls a "ribald,[11] scornful, fanatically curious tone." (L-148) They stem from long porings over sex manuals, from scandals overheard or invented, from attempts to piece together a true picture of the relationship between Fern and Mr. Chamberlain. The latter plays an important role in Del's growing sexual awareness, for he not only sends her on the mission which allows her to examine Fern's pornographic treasures but treats her to numerous erotic nudges and finally to a demonstration of his own masturbating power. Del is never troubled by misgivings. Her willingness to participate in any enlightening experience appears as Mr. Chamberlain brings her into the woods and she admits only to feeling "violently anxious to know what would be done" to her. This lack of inhibition belies Mrs. Jordan's conviction that "sex was something no woman — no intelligent woman — would ever submit to unless she had to." (L-230) The information

Del gathers about sex makes a bad joke of it; she does not associate it with love till she meets Garnet.

Her first attempt at establishing a heterosexual relationship brings little satisfaction and involves the comic scene in which she grants Jerry Story the "education" of seeing "a real live naked woman." Naïvely proud of her body, she is nevertheless skeptical about her ability to awaken the lover in Jerry.

> Did he want to turn me into some comfortable girl with lust uncomplicated by self-consciousness, a girl without sharp answers, or a large vocabulary, or any interest in the idea of order in the universe, ready to cuddle him down? (L-204)

Naomi sitting under a tree (the same one to which the serpent guided Eve?) evinces "a new delicate regard for herself" touched with both coyness and passivity. (L-173) She develops into the kind of girl Del is not, and although more frivolous than Helen of "Postcard," suggests a similar kind of availability. Out of "politeness" Helen has lent herself to Clare's demands.

> He didn't expect anything more of me, never expected anything, but just to lie there and let him, and I got used to that. I looked back and thought am I a heartless person, just to lie there and let him grab me and love me and moan around my neck and say the things he did, and never say one loving word back to him? I never wanted to be a heartless person and I was never mean to Clare, and I did let him, didn't I, nine times out of ten? (D-135)

Apparently the nineteenth century injunction to "suffer and be still"[12] has failed again! Helen does not see that she has been used by Clare for his pleasure and pathetically blames herself for the sterility of their relationship. In comparison, Del Jordan is very lucid and active. Constantly attentive to her reactions, she feels the exhilarations not only of sexual intercourse but of growing self-knowledge. Nothing here of dutiful passivity. Petting sessions with Garnet give her the "feeling of being languid and protected and at the same time possessing unlimited power." Her key word for these sessions are "audacity" and "revelation." She understands sex as "all surrender — not the woman's to the man but the person's to the body, an act of pure faith, freedom in humility." (L-218) Religiously connotative words emphasize the sublime nature of her discoveries, and the already assertive Del experiences a new importance. Recalling Garnet's face at the moment of her defleration, she comments: "That I could be the occasion to anyone of such pain and release made me marvel at myself." (L-228) She is similarly surprised at Garnet's effect on her when she achieves orgasm. She says that she had

> discovered such seizures by myself, some time ago, with many impatient, indeed ravenous, imaginary lovers. But I was amazed to undergo it in company, so to speak; it did seem almost too private, and lonely a thing, to find at the heart of love. (L-229).

The fact that Del cannot share her feelings with Garnet is not only a disappointment to her but a sign that their relationship cannot last. The element of dialogue is too important for a girl destined to be a writer. Yet, Garnet has provided her with a stirring experience. From an early belief that "to be made of flesh was humiliation" (L-57) she has passed to wonder that physical joys can be so owerwhelming.

Alice Munro has admitted in her interview with Graeme Gibson that she wished in her novel "to try to get down the feelings that women have about men,"[13] and the widely differing attitudes which she expresses have already been referred to incidentally in this chapter. These attitudes are variations of three positions. First, is that in which man is considered the enemy, an idea implicit in Mrs. Jordan's warning that "some degradation was possible, if ever you were persuaded to go off with boys" (L-42) and also in Del's feeling that even young boys harbour cruel desires for sexual domination.

> Boy's hate was dangerous, it was keen and bright, a miraculous birthright. . . . Boys would bear down on you on their bicycles and cleave the air where you had been, magnificently, with no remorse, as if they wished there were knives on the wheels. And they would say anything . . . . The things they said stripped away your freedom to be what you wanted, reduced you to what it was they saw, and that plainly, was enough to make them gag. (L-117)

Opposed to this attitude is one which is not threatening, for it sets men off at a healthy distance in their rather cold male objectivity.

> Uncle Craig . . . often thought me flighty and stupid and I did not care much; there was something large and impersonal about his judgment that left me free. He himself was not hurt or diminished in any way by my unsatisfactoriness, though he would point it out. This was the great difference between disappointing him and disappointing somebody like my mother, or even my aunts. Masculine self-centredness made him restful to be with. (L-30)

The third position allows for the assumption by women of desirable masculine traits. Comparing herself to Jerry, Del realizes that she is wasting effort in seeking for "protective coloration" (L-200) and that she can learn from him to be herself simply. She rejects the frail feminine stereotype in favour of the more virile one: "Men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn't want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same." (L-177)

All three positions recognize something "tender, swollen, tyrannical, absurd" (L-197) in the male structure. This might almost indicate feminine complacency if it were not for the frank admission of female weaknesses which Alice Munro has included in her celebration of the woman's life.

II

> I wanted to find a believer, a true believer, on whom I could rest my doubts. I wanted to watch and take heart from such a person, not talk to them. (L-180)
>
> I had never had a picture of God so clear and uncomplicated as my picture of the burglars. My mother was not so ready to refer to Him. (L-93)

The word "believer" is Del's word, and it also is Alice Munro's word. It means both those who believe in God, and those who affect to believe in God. Inevitably Del Jordan's search in Lives of Girls and Women for the former among the latter is a solitary, disillusioning and unsuccessful one. But it is not lacking in passion and is no doubt spurred on by the agnosticism of Del's mother. Despite the girl's sincerity, she neither finds the God she is looking for nor finds a Christianity capable of informing her life. Religion has not been presented to her as life with a loving God but as a series of mysteries to be arduously pierced. Del cries out

> If God could be discovered or recalled, everything would be safe . . . . It seemed plain to me that this was the only way the world could be borne, the only way it could be borne — if all those atoms, galaxies of atoms, were safe all the time, whirling away in God's mind. How could people rest, how could they even go on breathing and existing, until they were sure of this? They did go on, so they must be sure. (L-100)

Where does Del find this need to be sure of God's sustaining power? Evidently not from the attractiveness of the faith she sees in her immediate surroundings. Among the people she associates with religion are many imbalanced individuals, impractical dreamers who have given up their hold on reality.

1

Del Jordan's own grandmother is described by Del's mother as "a religious fanatic" who once "in the last demented stages of Christianity . . . wandered down to the barn and tried to hide a little bull calf in the hay, when the butchers' men were coming."(L-75) She neglected her household duties to kneel weeping in prayer. The one experience which "cured [Del's mother] of religion for life" was that of having to trudge over the countryside in rags distributing bibles her mother had bought with an unlooked-for inheritance. As a child, Del's mother was "a little girl . . . with cropped hair because her mother guarded her against vanity" and she came in after school to find "the fire out, the stove cold, the grease from the men's dinner thickened on the plates and pans." She grew up in a sterile and unwholesome atmosphere, entirely lacking in warmth and robustness. To be religious as Del's grandmother was is to reject joy and humanity. Del sums up the forbidding quality of such a religion by setting her mother's childhood home in a landscape reminiscent of El Greco or Edgar Allan Poe.

> In the beginning, the very beginning of everything, there was that house. It stood at the end of a long lane, with wire fences, sagging windowpanes of wire on either side, in the middle of fields where the rocks ... were poking through the soil like bones through flesh. The house ... appeared ... as ... — the barest, darkest, tallest of all old frame houses, simple and familiar yet with something terrible about it, enclosing evil, like a house where a murder has been committed. (L-75)

If Del inherits any tendency towards matters religious, it can hardly be via her grandmother, unless in some fashion a challenge is set up in her subconscious: to emerge sane from a gloomy mystery, like some modern Childe Roland issuing from a dark tower.

Naomi's father provides another example of unpleasant withdrawal into religion. He is a toothless old man who spends his days reading the Bible alone in the bedroom to which he has been relegated. When he presents the parable of the wise and foolish virgins to Naomi and Del, he does it so suggestively that they rush out to scrawl obscenities on the walls of the Ladies' Toilet in the Town Hall. (L-157) He beats Naomi cruelly on the night where she returns late from a dance. When he makes her "get down on her knees on the kitchen floor and pray to God that she [will] never taste liquor again," (L-193) it is very doubtful that he brings his daughter any closer to the God who fills his life.

Uncle Benny interprets the rainbow as Genesis does and worries about the location of Heaven, but his childishness and eccentricity offset the vivacity of his beliefs. His naïve intensities amuse Del.

> In all his statements, predictions, judgements there was a concentrated passion. In our yard, once, looking up at a rainbow, he cried, "You know what that is? That's the Lord's promise that there isn't ever going to be another flood!" He quivered with the momentousness of this promise as if it had just been made, and he himself was the bearer of it. (L2)

When Del writes out his complete address (Mr. Benjamin Thomas Poole, The Flats Road, Jubilee, Wawanash County, Ontario, Canada, North America, The Western Hemisphere, The World, The Solar System, The Universe), he wants to know where that is in relation to Heaven and insists that there *is* something without end after the universe. He clinches the argument triumphantly: "You don't ever get to the end of Heaven, because the Lord is there!" (L-11) But this is all far off and gains little by passing through the sieve of Uncle Benny's literalness.

It is not arguments that will convince Del. She is looking for the kind of witness who is happily taken up with the business of being human. Embarking upon her search for religious assurance, she comments:

> I wanted to find a true believer, on whom I could rest my doubts. I wanted to watch and take heart from such a person, not talk to them. At first I had thought it might be Mrs. Sherriff, but she would not do; her craziness disqualified her. My believer must be luminously sane. (L-108)

Are these expectations too high? In any case, they are not met. The small brother Owen is completely indifferent; to the superficial Naomi, faith is no problem. When asked by Del if she believes in God, she tosses off the self-assured reply: "of course I do, I'm not like your old lady. Do you think I want to go to Hell?" (L-104) Del's own craving for God goes far beyond the socially conform or the legalistic; into it enters no fear of punishment. Somehow she has managed to avoid the mercenary. "The idea of God did not connect for me with any idea of being good, which is perhaps odd, considering all about sins and wickedness, that I did listen to. I believed in being saved by faith alone, by some great grab of the soul." (L-101)

2

For an example of someone intensely alive who combines awe for the spiritual with earthy forays into the passionate, Del is indebted to her reading. In a world of stark contrasts where mystical piety and bloody feuds are close neighbours, Del meets a remarkable woman. The scene is medieval Norway; the woman, Sigrid Undset's Kristin Lavransdatter. There is much more than time to separate the worlds of Del and Kristin. How far from Jubilee is this world where all men are children of God, aspiring to be his servants. Life has an eternal perspective and man is already part of God's supernatural kingdom. Even when man succumbs to temptation, he is not in doubt that he has sinned, for God is the centre of his life. This orderly vision which Kristin shares with the people of her age contains moments of illumination that play a decisive role in keeping Del's desire for religious experience alive. A brief summary of Kristin's life will show that it is not lacking in the type of titillating elements sure to maintain Del's interest.

Kristin is happy with her industrious parents and seems to enjoy an idyllic childhood, but her vision of the elf-maiden in a mountain stream suggests that evil forces surround her and that earthly delights will have a strong pull. This is verified when she rejects the idea of entering a monastery because human love appears too enticing. Her childhood sweetheart Arne is slain by Bentein who had tried to violate her. Her father then arranges for a marriage with Simon for whom she feels little attraction. When she meets Erlend, she remembers that a witch-like relative had predicted they would one day be in love. She gives herself to him completely despite the fact that he already has children and a mistress. Guilt builds up as this woman commits suicide because of threats from Erlend and Kristin, and as Kristin finds herself pregnant before her marriage. For the headstrong Kristin and the adventurous Erlend, a stormy life ensues. Seven sons are born. One of the reasons Erlend leaves home is that he cannot endure Kristin's bickering about how to raise these children. She conceives her eighth child on a visit to him after he has moved away to a cottage among the hills. Neighbours say that Ulf, her steward, is the father of this child. When Erlend returns to defend her against the charge, he is put to death by an angry mob. Kristin's life from then on is taken up with regaining peace and harmony. She goes into a monastery but dies — before she can become a professed nun — while caring for victims of the Black Death.

Obviously, there is much here to please Del, but the specifically religious is most relevant. The visit to a magnificent Gothic cathedral, for example, provides Kristin with an experience marked by both sensuousness and reverence.

> Right over against her on the nave's south wall stood a picture, and shone as if it were made of naught but gleaming precious stones. The many-hued flecks of light upon the wall came from rays which stood out from that picture; she herself and the monk stood in the midst of the glory; her hands were red as though dipped in wine; the monk's visage seemed all golden, and his dark frock threw the picture's colours softly back . . . 'Twas like standing far off and looking into the heavenly kingdom . . . . She made out little by little the Lord Christ Himself in the most precious of red robes, the Virgin Mary in raiment blue as heaven, holy men and maidens in shining yellow and green and violet array.[1]

The odour of incense is all about them as Kristin poses her childish questions and the gentle Brother Edvin intones replies which Del must find so full of savour. Kristin wonders at the smallness of the dragon in the picture of her holy namesake but is told confidently that

> dragons and all such-like that serve the devil, seem great only so long as fear is in ourselves. But if a man seek God fervently and with his soul, so that his longing wins into his strength, then does the devil's power suffer at once such great downfall that his tools become small and powerless — dragons and evil spirits sink down and become no bigger than sprites and cats and crows.[2]

Edvin warns Kristin that the world and the flesh are appealing but he is so gay and happy that he makes the spiritual combat appear an exciting adventure. In a charming image, he says that if he had enough "true faith and love," he could "take these old fur mittens here and hang them upon yonder sunbeam."[3]

God is part of all of Kristin's relationships. Arne, when he bids her good-bye, says his love will continue even though Kristin is promised to another. He protests by what is most holy: "As sure as God suffered death for us all — I know not how I can ever be happy in this world again after today —"[4] The vows which Kristin and Erlend exchange privately call upon God as witness. "May God forsake me if any maid or woman come to my arms ere I make you mine in law and honour," says Erlend. And Kristin responds: "May God forsake me if I take any other man to my arms so long as I live on earth."[5] Not to bring God into one's life is sinful, as Kristin realizes in reflecting upon how she defended herself from Bentein. Her heart throbs as she remembers that "she had not for a moment thought of God nor prayed for His help."[6] Having sinned with Erlend, Kristin asks Brother Edvin's counsel. She knows she has offended God, even though she seems to blame the strength of passion.

> When I was a girl at home 'twas past my understanding how aught could win such power over the souls of men that they could forget the fear of sin; but so much have I learned now: if the wrongs men do through lust and anger cannot be atoned for, then must heaven be an empty place?

That heaven should be empty, however, is just a wild imagining for her. Atonement is possible, and Kristin carries it out in hope. Fearing that the child she bears will be marked by her sin, she prays to Holy King Olav during the wedding ceremony and promises to go barefoot on a pilgrimage to his shrine.

> Holy Olav! Yet do I pray for grace. Pray thou for mercy for my son; take him beneath thy guard; so shall I bear him to thy church on my naked feet, so shall I bear my golden garland of maidenhood in to thee and lay it down upon thy altar, if thou wilt but help me. Amen.[8]

Her sadness, even during the wedding feast, is proof enough that divine realities must be reckoned with.

As Del follows Kristin throughout the fullness of her life, she cannot help but be profoundly moved by the drama of the conflict which rages in her heroine's heart whenever she gives in to self-will. Carl Bayerschmidt has said of Kristin Lavransdatter that

> it is more than just a realistic novel. It is a religious work which is concerned not with man's heart, but with his soul, and the victory of the soul over the flesh. It is not an easy victory, for Sigrid Undset has an open eye to man's sensual nature. Her most finely drawn characters are those men and women of flesh and blood who are torn between the two irreconcilable poles of human will and divine will.[9]

In the absence of living examples of persons for whom God is all, Del has been inspired by this story of a woman who never one moment doubts the reality of the spiritual. Kristin's convictions, however, would have little influence on Del if she were a plaster saint. But her struggle is genuine. And it is vividly described in a style Alrik Gustafson has said to be "determined in every detail by Sigrid Undset's characteristic habits of mind — the sombre massiveness with which her spirit broods over the essentially sad yet not ignoble materials of human experience."[10] Little wonder that the lusty and sensitive Del should be impressed by a spiritual saga of this nature.

There is, to be sure, much vicarious thrill involved in Del's enjoyment of Kristin Lavransdatter. She admits that it has helped her imagine she has "a lover like Erlend, just such a flawed and dark and lonely horseback rider," (L-119) but she considers the book as more than an opportunity for romantic escape. And she is ashamed to exploit its sexual aspects for Naomi's benefit.

> I found the place where Kristin has her first baby, hour after hour, page after page, blood and agony, squatting on the straw. I felt a slight sadness, handing this over. I was always betraying someone or somebody; it seemed the only way to get along. This book was not a curiosity to me. (L-119)

Once engaged in the betrayal, Del finds the single-minded Naomi not moved by poetical expressions.

> 'Is there a part in the book where they do it?'
>
> Anxious to justify literature in Naomi's eyes — like a minister trying hard to show how religion can be practical, and fun — I hunted around and found the part where Kristin and Erlend took shelter in the barn. But it did not satisfy her.
>
> 'Is that supposed to be telling that they do it?'
>
> I pointed out Kristin's thought. Was this ill thing the thing that was sung of in all the songs?

Such a line can hardly "justify literature" for Naomi. Del, however, has seen that worlds other than her own are possible.

Long after she has "turned away from [her] old favourites, Kristin Lavransdatter, historical novels" (L-175), Del uses an image which suggests she has not forgotten Kristin. As the preparation for university entrance examinations absorbs her, she shuts herself into the front room which becomes her "cell or chapel." There, she works so hard that she emerges "exhausted, incapable of thought as a nun after hours of prayer or a lover, maybe, after punishing devotions." (L-208) The figure is not forged out of Jubilee experience. Rather, it echoes the state of the penitent Kristin, regretting her surrender to Erlend who represented for her the "ecstatic chaos of unlimited freedom in which every divine and human rule is broken."[11] In Jubilee one does not worry that much about God's feelings. The consequences of sexual intercourse are of minor concern to a girl prudent enough to be fitted with a diaphragm — as Jerry Storey's mother suggests Del should be. And "divine rule" seems very remote to someone like Mrs. Jordan who has adopted the practical stand.

> Yes, oh yes, there must be something — some design. But it was no use wasting time thinking about it, she warned, because we could never understand it, anyway; there was quite enough to think about if we started trying to improve life in the here and now for a change; when we were dead we would find out about the rest of it, if there was any rest of it. (L-100)

Del's mother would not be likely to see a nun's devotions as figurative of concentration upon a task.

3

The Ontario town which Alice Munro uses as backdrop for her characters is definitely areligious and incapable of supporting the type of quest for the Absolute upon which Del's reading has embarked her. A canvassing of Dance of the Happy Shades will show how the short stories emphasize the religious vacuum which confronts Del. At the most one can only find evidences of sectarianism, which appears as a technique to keep people apart.

In the opening story, a Walker Brothers' salesman visits an old girl friend with his two children. It soon becomes obvious that this woman's Catholicism may have been the factor which prevented a marriage. The small girl who is the narrator recognizes the Virgin Mary in a picture on the wall ("Jesus' mother — I know that much") and then remembers that her grandmother and aunt have a special saying about Catholics: "So-and-so digs with the wrong foot." There is nothing very gay about the visit, and on the way home, as the child recalls her grandmother's saying, she comments that "the words seem sad . . . as never before, dark, perverse." One feels that her intuition about the wrongs which can result from discrimination has been correctly applied to her father's case. But it may also suggest that where religion is used for no more than marking persons off, only the dismal world of Dance of the Happy Shades is possible. Lonely Nora with her blind mother stands at the head of the characters this book presents — all unhappy products of a rudderless society. The book closes on an aged piano-teacher who appears ridiculous because she has a "way of speaking of children's hearts as if they were something holy," but is happier than the shallow women who reign over a suburbia which acknowledges no world other than the secular. Miss Marsalles' world may be crumbling in a special way, but it is surrounded by no solid alternative.

"Thanks for the Ride" makes a few incidental comments on the sham which religion has become. The young man who tells the story says that he has come to town

> to bring my mother home from a beach resort for women, a place where they had fruit juice and cottage cheese for reducing, and early-morning swims in the Lake, and some religion, apparently, for there was a little chapel attached. (D-46)

The loose construction of the sentence suggests that the lakeside chapel and what it has to offer is secondary among the interests of the ladies who attend the resort. It will probably have even less meaning for their children, as we can conclude if we note that the narrator's obnoxious cousin will stay over for church the next day only because his mother makes his doing so the condition for loaning him some money. A rather insipid picture: middle-aged women trying to regain their youthful figures, and stooping to bribery to lure their sons to dimly grasped values they themselves are incapable of transmitting. The language of the young men betrays their bored, uninspired lives. George's muttered complaint combines irreverence with his disgust at the lack of girls: "What a dump! Jesus, what a dump!" For boys like this there is no other god in the offing after the name of the incumbent has been reduced to an expletive.

The child in "Images" describes the vapid Jesus her early training has presented. She compares him to her mother, whom illness has made overly sensitive.

> She spoke of herself gloomily in the third person, saying, 'Be careful, don't hurt Mother, don't sit on Mother's legs.' Every time she said Mother I felt chilled, and a kind of wretchedness and shame spread through me as it did at the name of Jesus. The Mother that my own real, warm-necked, irascible and comforting human mother set up between us was an ever-lastingly wounded phantom, sorrowing like Him over all the wickedness I did not yet know I would commit. (D-33)

A Jesus so vulnerable can hardly be attractive. Weak bogeyman, invented to support a moralistic generation, he will not be able to inspire lasting loyalty.

Another story which points out that the religion of the parents is meaningless to the children is "Sunday Afternoon." It is easy to forget that Mrs. Gannett's parents have come in "after service at St. Martin's" and, in any case, their having done so is irrelevant to the joyless lounging around that goes on in their daughter's house that afternoon. One senses a sterility similar to that which Wallace Stevens discusses in the poem "Sunday Morning" — the titles of both works suggesting a relationship of theme. The country girl who is Mrs. Gannett's maid finds the house cold and empty as compared to her own home.

> Alva found it already hard to remember that the rooms at home . . . could hold so many things; here were such bland unbroken surfaces, such spaces — a whole long, wide passage empty, except for two tall Danish vases standing against the farthest wall, carpet, walls, and ceiling all done in blue variants of grey. (D-33)

The elegant setting remains unwarmed by the summer sun, and the people are noisily gay or "absorbed and melancholy," their hearts emptier than the rooms. Unlike Stevens' woman, these people do not even question the idea that the here and now may be their only paradise. But they live as if they agree with the voice that cries:

> 'The tomb in Palestine
> Is not the porch of spirits lingering.
> It is the grave of Jesus, where He lay.'[12]

No metaphysical probings make up the conversations of Alice Munro's society people. They are members of the generation which Stevens describes as living "in an old chaos of the sun" — where symbols and myths have died, where "the holy hush of ancient sacrifice" is "dissipated" by just such comfort as Stevens gives to the woman who ponders the meaning of life, wrapped in

> Complacencies of the peignoir, and late
> Coffee and oranges in a sunny chair,
> And the green freedom of a cockatoo
> Upon a rug . . .[13]

These are the people whom Del Jordan meets when she turns to modern books that teach her "about drinks. Whiskey and soda. Gin and tonic. Cinzano, Benedictine, Grand Marnier." (L-175) It is a world inhabited by "rich and titled people who despised the very sort of people who in Jubilee were at the top of society — druggists, dentists, storekeepers." Like Mrs. Gannett's maid, Del feels inferior to those who live so far from her home town. She does not disagree with Jerry Storey's view.

> That I was immeasurably smarter than most people in Jubilee should not blind me, he said, to the fact that I would soon reach my limits in the intellectually competitive world outside. ('The same goes for myself,' he added severely. 'I always try to keep a perspective. I look pretty good at Jubilee High School. How would I look at M.I.T.?') (L-196)

It may be that Del will meet her intellectual superiors outside Jubilee, but if one listens to the overtones of a story like "Sunday Afternoon," such does not seem to be the case for the spiritual or religious areas.

In Jubilee, rich and poor submit to the ceremonies of religion, but in discussing them, recall exterior aspects which indicate that these are social exercises more than anything else. In the story called "Postcard," Helen gets this reply from her mother when she says that Clare's sister goes by the name of Porky:

> I remember her being baptized and her name was Isabelle. Way back before I was married, I was still singing in the choir. They had one of these long, fangle-dangle christening robes on her, you know them. (D-131)

One can imagine the choir members nudging one another about the degrees of finery exhibited as various families present their babies for baptism. Singing in the choir appears to be a form of socializing available to otherwise bored girls. The thirty-three-year-old unmarried mother of "A Trip to the Coast" is trapped in a dull routine which Sunday morning service can hardly alleviate.

> Hazel drove all over the country to dances with other girls who worked in Kincaid or taught school. On Sunday morning she got up with a hangover and took coffee with aspirin and put on her silk print dress and drove off down the road to sing in the choir. Her mother, who said she had no religion, opened up the store and sold gas and ice cream to tourists. (D-178)

As with the ladies in "Thanks for the Ride," the impression is that activities involved with religious practice are distinctly marginal, if they do not, as in this case, offer outright escape from drudgery.

The haunting story called "The Time of Death," in which a little girl is responsible for her brother's death by scalding, brings out great spiritual poverty. The only effort to put words to the situation is made by two Salvation Army women whose pious clichés fail to express any real significance. Their comment that "God needed another flower and he took your child" does not ring true to the neighbours, who "listen uneasily" and react with "a look of embarrassed childish solemnity." They have that elementary honesty which refuses to be consoled by a faith not integrated into their own lives. All they can do is respond to the awesomeness of the occasion with faces that are "pale and heavy, hung with the ritual masks of mourning and compassion." When they speak, it is in "the stately tones of ritual soothing." Benny's case has much to leave one speechless, of course. Here in the colourless Ontario town which provides so little opportunity for achieving human dignity, he seems a classic example of Sartre's conclusion in The Nausea that "Every existing being is born without reason, prolongs itself out of weakness, and dies by chance."[14] That Christianity has failed to take root here may be subtly suggested with the image of the quilt. When Patricia comments on its beauty, Mrs. McGee looks "surprised and rather distracted" as she says, "Oh, yes, that's a Star-of-Bethlehem." No new light or warmth is available for the children, however, and like modern counterparts of the slain Innocents, they huddle together in fear.

Alice Munro's teachers are a rather unpleasant lot — perhaps especially those associated with religion. The man who is principal in "Red Dress — 1946," for example, has "a cold, self-relishing voice — he read the Scriptures every morning — and a great talent for inflicting humiliation." The details suggest that Scripture is used to instill puritanical severities. But in any case, it is paradoxical that the reading of the word of God should be an occasion for an adult to reveal his own remoteness and pride. The pathetic Helen of "Postcard" taught Sunday School when she was younger, and she is very much aware that Buddy Shields, the night constable who comes to silence her outside Clare's home, was once her pupil. "It never seemed to occur to him that it was funny for him to be lecturing me, that used to hear his Bible verses and caught him reading Leviticus on the sly." (D-145) The cause of Sunday schools and church choirs is not helped when Buddy tries to console Helen by telling her the story of the couple he has recently rescued from an angry farmer.

> You would know both of them if I said their names and you'd know they had no business being in that car together. One is a married lady. And worst is, by this time her husband is wondering why she don't come home from choir practice — both these parties sings in the choir, I won't tell you which one — and he has reported her missing. (D-146)

As guardian of the law, Buddy now knows more about the secret lives of the people in town than he did when he was Helen's student. His story is an implied reproach to her as a person, but an indication also of the town's moral tone.

Going by the MacQuarrie home one day, Helen and her mother notice stained-glass windows "like in a church." (D-132) This home has been the scene of Clare's opportunistic conduct towards Helen as well as of other examples of selfishness and deceit. Perhaps after all it is not so different from the churches attended by Alice Munro's people.

A dozen or so allusions in all, then, here is what one can glean from *Dance of the Happy Shades* concerning the religious life of its characters. Meager gleanings, much in line with the superficial type of religion these people know and the little extent to which it influences their lives.

4

Against just such a background Del Jordan sets out upon her private religious quest. The extravagances of grotesque characters like Uncle Benny, Naomi's father, her own grandmother have not deterred her from what might easily appear a flirtation with insanity; nor has her mother's agnosticism prevented her from seeking answers to questions provoked by her reading, by notions gathered haphazardly, by her own musings on the nature of God and human life. Although Del is regularly exposed to a course called "Religious Education," from which only her Catholic classmates are exempted, (L-94) it does not occur to her to appeal to her teachers or to a minister.

> I did not think of taking my problem to any believer, even to Mr. McLaughlin, the minister. It would have been unthinkably embarrassing. Also, I was afraid. I was afraid the believer might falter in defending his beliefs, or defining them, and this would be a setback for me. If Mr. McLaughlin, for instance, turned out to have no firmer a grasp on God than I did, it would be a huge though not absolute discouragement. I preferred to believe his grasp was good, and not try it out. (L-97)

The early phase of Del's quest involves attending the Anglican services, begging God directly for a revelation, and stooping to petitional prayer of what she herself admits is a "vulgar" type. (L-102) This last experience proves to be disastrous to Del's fragile faith.

The humourous touches which flash through the chapter entitled "Age of Faith" are in keeping with Del's rugged, lively character. She has a secret hope that God will reveal himself to her as "a dome of light, a bubble radiant and indisputable above the modern pews" or that he will "flower suddenly as a bank of daylilies below the organ pipes" but she feels that to express this hope to anyone else would be as "inappropriate as farting." (L-96) Her imagery hovers like this between the exquisite and the vulgar, Del remaining very much herself even as she knocks at the door of divinity.

> Sometimes walking along the street I would shut my eyes (the way Owen and I used to do, playing blind) and say to myself — frowning praying — "God. God. *God*." Then I would imagine for a few precarious seconds a dense bright cloud descending on Jubilee, wrapping itself around my skull. But my eyes flew open in alarm; I was not able to let that in, or me out. Also I was afraid of bumping into something, being seen, making a fool of myself. (L-106)

Such sudden descents have a Huckleberry Finn quality about them which make Del all the more endearing. Like Huck, Del is willing to take risks when the importance of her cause warrants her doing so, as for example when she smuggles a prayer book from the Anglican church, and has an awkward moment shaking hands with the minister at the door — with the stolen book pressed under a "crooked arm." (L-101) On occasion, she is willing to temporize with the truth, just as Huck must so often do. She steals away from the United church to pursue investigations among the Anglicans, and when Fern observes that she could not see her during the service, shoots back: "I was behind a post." (L-101) One gathers that Del has a tacit understanding with God and that she counts on his good nature to accept certain little irregularities. There is an innocence about this which recalls Adam's familiarity with God as he walked in the garden before the fall.

As much is revealed about Del's God as about herself. He is not a cruel tyrant, ready to strike her down at the slightest misdemeanor nor a kind white-bearded old gentleman. Neither is he "a livin'doll," associated with the type of "sweetness and sugar-coating nonsense" that Gabriel Vahanian feels is responsible for making religion appear archaic to the modern world.[15] He is hardly even a person, but a faraway mysterious power, an organizing principle who, if he exists at all, is responsible alone for the orderly working of the universe. Del's stance in questioning him is far from that advocated by Andrew Greeley in a recent book on modern religious thought.

> I shall not be "serious" in my discussion of God, and this will offend both theists and atheists who believe that the subject of the deity must necessarily be serious. But just as the sober language of rational and empirical science is inadequate to cope with God, so is the stolid, dull language of "scientific" philosophy and theology. Professor Sten Stensen tells us the language which man uses to describe God is the same as the language he uses to tell jokes, and that is, I think, as it should be. When the Christian is asked whether his God is "serious" or not he must respond that he is not serious, that Gilbert Keith Chesterton was right in suggesting that God was a joker and that the subject of man's relationship with God is something of such importance that it cannot be treated with anything but laughter.[16]

Del never laughs. She is unaware of ever being a comic figure. Her questions have a tone of desperate intensity. It must be that the banter suggested by Greeley and Chesterton is possible only where faith is already fairly well established.

Del's faith has reached the rudimentary stage of a confused set of questions dancing about one another. No one answers these questions. It is true, of course, that she asks no one, and even if she were to, it might be that she would not ask the right things. But judging from the absence of convinced or convincing believers about her, one might be justified in agreeing that Christianity is dead. Yet what appears to be a post-Christian society contains children like Del, wandering about with very Christian questions.

Gabriel Vahanian, in discussing the irrelevance of Christianity to the modern world, quotes from Salinger's Holden Caulfield — a young person who finds it more overtly difficult than Del to accept what he sees around him.

> This period is not even anti-Christian. If it were non-Christian or even anti-Christian, one could be witness unto it, even a martyr. Any of these possibilities would appear natural. Holden Caulfield, in Salinger's Catcher in the Rye, reflects the true temper of the age when he remarks about ministers that "they all have these Holy Joe voices when they start giving their sermons. God, I hate that. I don't see why the hell they can't talk in their natural voice." There is no correlation any longer between the Christian faith and the modern situation of man. That is why Christianity seems, in the word of a post-Christian, "unnatural."[17]

There is every indication that Del reaches a similar conclusion regarding Christianity, but she is attracted rather than repelled by its dissociation from the culture she knows. When she first enters the Anglican church, she is impressed by the minister's English accent, his "fine, harmonizing . . . restrained English voice" and also by the prayers, where "lively emotion [is] safely contained in the most elegant channels of language." (L-99) Mrs. Sherriff, who appears to be one of the most fervent members of the congregation, is a character from another age, not quite human even.

> Kneeling erectly, lifting her chalky wolfish profile skyward — it reminded me of the profile of a Crusader's effigy, in the encyclopedia at home — she led all the other voices in the congregation, indeed dominated them so that they were no more than a fuzzy edge of hers, which was loud, damp, melodic, mournfully exultant. (L-99)

Del who is "strongly delighted" by the "theatrical in religion" does not worry that what she especially enjoys is the anachronistic.

> If I could not quite get a scent of God then at least I could get the scent of His old times of power, real power, not what He enjoyed in the United Church today; I could remember His fabled hierarchy, His lovely mouldered calendar of feasts and saints. There they were in the prayer book, I opened on them by accident — saints' days. Did anybody keep them? Saints' days made me think of something so different from Jubilee — open mows and half-timbered farmhouses and the Angelus and candles, a procession of nuns in the snow, cloister walks, all quiet, a world of tapestry, secure in faith. Safety. (L-100)

Not only does she implicitly concur that religion is a thing of the past, but she readily accepts its closeness to superstition. "I liked the idea of calling Jesus Jesu sometimes; it made Him sound more kingly and magical, like a wizard or an Italian god." (L-99)

Del's association with Garnet French has only the exterior marks of religious experience. She meets him at a revival; parts of their courtship are carried out in the Baptist church which is so important to him; and finally, her rejection of him coincides with a refusal to accept baptism. But all of these things are accidental, Del having closed her religious inquiry even before she meets Garnet.

It is only because she feels "obliged, out of contrariness" (L-209) to accept a "Come to Jesus" button that Del attends the revival in the first place. Mr. Buchanan — the history teacher who looks like a "turn-of-the-century cyclist" (another figure from the past) — does not expect her to be interested when he hands out the buttons, and so she must accept one. She goes to the revival as an observer and maintains her disinterested attitude throughout the sermon, noting emotions but not sharing them. What counts for her is the meeting with Garnet and when this boy, whom she has never met, puts his hand close to hers, she says that "it seemed as if all sensation in my body, all hope, life, potential, flowed down into that one hand." (L212) Here is a foreshadowing of the fact that the Garnet French episode will deprive Del of a scholarship and almost jeopardize her chances of becoming a writer. She is entering the unknown world of her own sexuality, an area which for the time being she keeps carefully apart from all the rest of her life. When she says "I felt angelic with gratitude, truly as if I had come out on another level of existence," (L-213) it is clear that her paradise contains no other god but Eros. At the end of the evening Garnet goes up to sign his pledge to Jesus; the possibility of doing so does not even occur to Del.

This non-involvement continues as Del attends meetings of the Baptist Young People's Society where she confesses to feeling "always amazed and lonely as somebody thrown up in a shipwreck." With this last word, Alice Munro may well be referring to Karl Jaspers' term for modern man's sense of rootlessness and insecurity, but she also wants to show that Del, in refusing to identify with the "Young People," does not accept as a palliative that religiosity which Vahanian defines as "an expression of sublimated loneliness, and for this reason . . . often collectivistic in its manifestations."[18] Just as it is impossible for Del to feel any communion with the people gathered in the Baptist church, so she cannot share in "what was called the worship service." When Garnet leads prayers, she has "that strange and confident sensation of being in a dream from which [she will] presently wake up." (L-216) The focus of her life is entirely upon what she will later call "the bounty of my lover's body." (L-241) That Garnet has been converted, has been saved by his religion from habits of drinking and fighting — has even considered becoming a minister does not register with Del. If she thinks of these aspects of his life, it is to mention their unimportance.

> I loved the dark side, the strange side, of him, which I did not know, not the regenerate Baptist; or rather, I saw the Baptist, of which he was proud, as a mask he was playing with that he could easily discard. (L-220)

Garnet is not a religious figure for her; he is a dispenser of abundant caresses, a high-priest of flesh, and the miracle he leads Del to is that of orgasm. (L-229)

When Del realizes that by baptizing her, Garnet is claiming more that her body, she refuses. The refusal is not made on religious grounds, however. For Del this baptism is not a sacrament of divine filiation, it is one of human surrender. Were she to accept it, she would be giving up her individuality to take on Garnet's pattern of life, which includes unquestioning compliance to obligations of form. Del sees no need for labels, and Garnet's suggestion that baptism will make her one "of us" (L-238) makes her fight him all the more. James Polk recognizes in this struggle "a gutsy metaphor for the 'whole modern male-female thing'"[19] and there is surely in Del's rejection the awareness that she has risked becoming a sexual object. The "fatal game" in which she had meant to keep Garnet "sewed up in his golden lover's skin forever" (L-238) has led him to think that he can take complete possession of her. How this might limit her is something she has divined from the very first.

> The person who could study was . . . locked away. I could not have made sense of any book, put one word after another, with Garnet in the room. It was all I could do to read the words on a billboard, when we were driving. It was the very opposite of going out with Jerry, and seeing the world dense and complicated but appallingly unsecretive; the world I saw with Garnet was something not far from what I thought animals must see, the world without names. (L-221)

What Del senses in Garnet is a threat to her humanity — his religion is only a part of this threat.

For Del's disillusionment with religion, one must go back to her own and her brother's experimentation with prayer. Both situations present the despair of a child in a technological society. In the first case Del, unable to control a sewing machine, has begged God to prove he exists by delivering her from the humiliating ordeal of having to thread the machine. She *is* exempted but suspects that the crucial factor is human intervention, i. e. her teacher's impatience rather than divine compassion. What she has fallen into is what Norman Pittenger calls "pestering the deity" — an error which of course is not exclusively hers, and which the same author goes on to regret in these terms:

> Petition, and that of an extremely crude kind, has been taken out of its rightful context and exalted in such a way that it was not entirely a parody when a friend of mine remarked, 'Prayer is bringing to God's attention what he has overlooked and so insisting upon getting one's way with him that he can only grant one's requests.' And providence has been reduced either to God's providing comfort for those who happen to please him or his arranging (in an illustration once employed by G. K. Chesterton in a bitter attack on such a cheap view of the matter) that banana-skins shall be placed conveniently, so that a man whom God likes can slip and fall on one of them, thus sparing himself from entering a bus which a few minutes later will plunge down a decline and bring to death all the passengers.[20]

Although Del acknowledges that her test of God's power is a naïve one, she sets out to indoctrinate her brother and admits to the futility of her cause only when he insists upon praying so that a favourite old dog turned sheep-killer will not be shot. Besides bringing up the question of the credibility of religious leaders, this last situation emphasizes the irrelevance of God to a world where men with guns are masters of life. In this world children do not know how to pray. They have been betrayed by their fathers who stand before them — like Del's father in a dream she has — with a "reasonable, blasphemous face." (L - 114) There are suggestions of something far more important than the disposing of an old dog in Del's chill observation.

> Death was made possible. And not only because it could not be prevented but because it was what was wanted — wanted, by all those adults, and managers, and executioners, with their kind implacable faces. (L-114)

Having led Owen into a grotesque faith and reduced him to the rank of pitiable beggar ("Seeing somebody have faith, close up, is no easier than seeing somebody chop a finger off"), Del has no place to turn. In this respect, Huck Finn is better off than she is. After his discovery that prayer does not "work," Huck is at least left with a choice between Miss Watson's and the widow's God.

> Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about Providence in a way to make a body's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see that there was two Providences, and a poor chap would stand considerable show with the widow's Providence, but if Miss Watson's got him there warn't no help for him any more. I thought it all out, and reckoned I would belong to the widow's if he wanted me, though I couldn't make out he was a-going to be any better off than what he was before, seeing I was so ignorant, and so kind of low-down and ornery.[21]

A century ago there were some adults who could find hope for themselves and their children in the vision of God which they entertained. Del Jordan receives no such inheritance from her parents. She would most likely rebel against it it she did, but this does not prevent her from feeling cheated. And the disproportion of her mother's concerns strike her. "I had never had a picture of God so clear and uncomplicated as my picture of the burglars. My mother was not so ready to refer to Him." (L-93) As the daughter of a materialistic age, Mrs. Jordan fears only those who are a menace to her possessions, and she believes in burglars because her heart is where her treasure is. Only the concrete world exists for her. In discussing the "undue preoccupation with life's instrumentality" which marks the Western world, Reinhold Niebuhr says that "the Occidental soul has wings but is so fascinated by its gilded cage that it does not care to fly."[22] Del Jordan's desire to know God implies that even a decadent Christianity is sufficient to keep alive the dream of something other than getting and spending. But in the Western world the believer is such an anomaly, even to himself, that he often abandons his search.

The questions, however, remain, all the more vivid that they have been posed with such intensity by Alice Munro's young heroine. Who is God? Who is Christ? Did he really suffer and did he rise from the dead? Who is man? What are sin and prayer? In the "Real Life" (L-242) which stretches out before her, it is very possible that Del will take up these questions again. She does not say she intends to. For the time being she is convinced of the irrelevance of Christianity.

III

> Walls of printed pages, evidence of so many created worlds — this was a comfort to me. (L-119)

> A time came when all the books in the Library in the Town Hall were not enough for me, I had to have my own. (L-244)

Personal experience may have suggested much of what has gone into the molding of Del Jordan, future novelist, and into the various other embodiments of the artist found throughout the works of Alice Munro. The composite figure which emerges from these works is one which thinks and questions, watches and listens, judges and discards — with both "real" people and literary creations as objects. Del Jordan is fascinated with stories and the style in which they are told. She experiences a progressively discriminating familiarity with the written word. In an early scene of the novel, she feels the power of words to forge reality. The passage clearly suggests the art of writing, for Del hears her mother creating and possessing the world, that is, defining both it and herself. They are returning to town.

> My mother would never let this sighting go by without saying something. "There's Jubilee," she might say simply, or, "Well, yonder lies the metropolis," or she might even quote, fuzzily, a poem about going in the same door as out she went. And by these words, whether weary, ironic, or truly grateful, Jubilee seemed to me to take its being. As if without her connivance, her acceptance, these streetlights and sidewalks, the fort in the wilderness, the open and secret pattern of the town — a shelter and a mystery — would not be there.
>
> Over all our expeditions, and homecomings, and the world at large, she exerted this mysterious, appalling authority, and nothing could be done about it, not yet. (L - 69)

What can "be done about it," once this power has been recognized in others is to assume it oneself. Del begins her creative experimentation tentatively but with visible enjoyment.

> I would go to the deep mirror in the built-in sideboard and look at the reflection of the room . . . . By getting them into a certain spot in the mirror I could make my mother and Fern Dogherty pull out like rubber bands, all wavering and hysterical, and I could make my own face droop disastrously down on one side, as if I had had a stroke. (L-71)

When she turns away from the mirror, Del does not, like Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, become paralyzed. Rather, she discovers that involvement with people is a better way of making the "jail-break and re-creation"[1] which Margaret Avison recommends — no doubt especially for the benefit of writers. In conversation with her mother, for example, Del tries "to lead her on, to get the answer, or the revelation, I particularly wanted." (L-72) She is gaining insight into life and human relationships but also making a valuable apprenticeship as novelist. Ethel Wilson has repeated Fielding's advice about talk in her "Cat Among the Falcons."

> Of conversation, that practical man Henry Fielding said that one of the natural and essential parts of a novelist's equipment is conversation — talking in the daytime, talking far into the night, and with all kinds of people. It can be electrically surprising — or not; and there are moments when it is one of the most charming and rewarding of human joys. So is silence.[2]

Alice Munro's writers have been given this recipe for learning.

I

The most elementary thing learned in the varied conversations carried on by Del Jordan is the weight of words: in their sounds, their meanings, their power. Del frequently speaks of her discoveries in terms of more accurate definitions. She is like the hero of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* in valuing words for their suggestive power, this in the very interplay of syllables and letters.

Her intimacies with Garnet French, for example, make her look at certain words differently.

> The very word, *pleasure*, had changed for me; I used to think it a mild sort of word, indicating a rather low-key self-indulgence; now it seemed explosive, the two vowels in the first syllable spurting up like fireworks, ending on the plateau of the last syllable, its dreamy purr. (L-218)

But even before remembered delights clothe words with new evocative capacity, Del responds to sounds. Hearing the word "tomb", she gives it a whole framework of associations.

> I loved the sound of that word when I first heard . . . it. I did not know exactly what it was, or had got it mixed up with womb, and I saw us inside some sort of hollow marble egg, filled with blue light, that did not need to get in from outside. (L-54)

Just looking at other words makes her want to pinpoint their effect.

> The words themselves . . . gave off flashes of power, particularly *fuck*, which I had never ~~been~~ able to really look at, on fences or sidewalks. I had never been able to contemplate before its thrust of brutality, hypnotic swagger. (L-167)

Lines that play with sound strike her memory, and when she quotes Browning, it is with delight.

> I would say to myself the line from the poem about "mistresses with great, smooth, marbly, limbs." I liked that; I liked the word *mistress,* a full-skirted word, with some ceremony about it. (L-185)

Alice Munro is having Del experience something of what Stephen Dedalus feels about words. This common interest seems appropriate for young people who will one day decide to use words in order to express visions. Here is

Stephen thinking about the effect on him of matching mood and expression.

> He drew forth a phrase from his treasure and spoke it softly to himself: "A day of dappled seaborne clouds." The phrase and the day and the scene harmonised in a chord. Words. Was it their colours? He allowed them to glow and fade, hue after hue . . . . No, it was not their colours; it was the poise and balance of the period itself. Did he then love the rhythmic rise and fall of words better than their associations of legend and colour? Or was it that . . . he drew less pleasure from the reflection of the glowing sensible world through the prism of the language many-coloured and richly storied than from the contemplation of an inner world of[3] individual emotions mirrored perfectly in a lucid supple periodic prose?

The speculations of Del may be less sophisticated than those of Stephen Dedalus but in both there is a similar sensitivity to literary expression and a concern to know more about the effect of language.

Del recounts errors she has made which serve to reveal her vivid imagination. When informed that her grandmother died "on the table," she had visualized her "stretched out dead on an ordinary table among the teacups and ketchup and jam." (L-77) Listening to explanations of her cousin's difficult birth, she had pictured the birth canal as "a straight-banked river of blood." (L-39) The quicksand hole about which Uncle Benny constantly warned the children took on a kind of wicked surrealism for Del when she imagined it "shining, with a dry-liquid roll — I had it mixed up with quicksilver." (L-2) Such inaccuracies affectionately recalled mark a growing awareness of a peculiar kind since they emphasize the power of language — bearer of impressions as well as of literal truths. Sometimes, Del purposely retains her private connotations, especially when words are associated with striking events. To the news that Uncle Craig has died while playing cards at Blue River in the Orange Hall, she has an interesting reaction.

> The card table, the bright Orange Hall. (Though I knew it was really the Orangemen's Hall, the name had nothing to do with the colour, any more than Blue River meant the river there was blue.) (L-46)

The detail points out Del's sensitivity to words as well as her desire to control them consciously.

Words from another language have the special appeal of the unfamiliar. Perhaps, however, a future writer is more likely than any other adolescent to use them to mark distances from the adult world — as Del teaches her friends to do. When a rather eccentric drama teacher is complimented with an Italian phrase, the young people feel they must grasp this daring bit of sound, so much better than a lowly nickname.

> We got hold of con brio, we planned to tell. We did not know or care what it meant, only that it was absurd — all foreign words were in themselves absurd — and dramatically explosive. Its aptness was recognized. (L-130)

The "Con brio, Miss Farris!" with which the lady is greeted from then on is considered a completely appropriate stroke ("We felt it was the final touch to her; it wound her up"). This desire to name persons correctly is surely the writer's preoccupation. If foreign syllables are more effective at marking off territory, why not use them? And the excluded should know better than to appropriate a language which is not theirs. Witness the bitter tone of the young narrator of "Red Dress — 1946" as she and her friend leave for a dreaded school dance.

> My mother followed us to the door and called out into the dark, "Au reservoir!" This was a traditional farewell of Lonnie's and mine; it sounded foolish and desolate coming from her, and I was so angry with her for using it that I did not reply. It was only Lonnie who called back cheerfully, encouragingly, "Good night!" (D-153)

Del Jordan knows that language can stake out areas of privacy. It is a mode of being, and her aunts' house appears therefore "a tiny sealed-off country, with its ornate customs and elegantly, ridicuously complicated language." (L-59)

Listening to opera provides Del with an intensely vital experience, no doubt also with an invitation to try some day to give life to characters of her own. Just as Carmen defines herself, so the author may define himself through his creations. An exhilarating possibility which Carmen's French in no way conceals.

> I loved most Carmen, at the end. Et laissez-moi passer! I hissed it between my teeth; I was shaken, imagining the other surrender, more tempting, more gorgeous even than the surrender to sex — the hero's, the patriot's, Carmen's surrender to the final importance of gesture, image, self-created self. (L-184)

Verbal exchanges where the pawn is a human destiny are as enlightening to the writer as passages of self-revelation. One of the short stories in Dance of the Happy Shades dramatizes the differences between classes, in a situation where the tyranny of group over individual manifests itself through words tossed down from the superior position. While her suburban neighbours make plans to have the owner of a tattered old house expropriated from their shining new neighbourhood, Mary stands helplessly by.

> Mary . . . hoped her voice would sound all right, not emotional or scared. "But remember she's been here a long time," she said. "She was here before most of us were born." She was trying desperately to think of other words, words more sound and reasonable than these; she could not expose to this positive tide any notion that they might think flimsy and romantic, or she would destroy her argument. But she had no argument. She could try all night and never find any words to stand up to their words, which came at her now invincibly from all sides; shack, eyesore, filthy, property, value. (D-27)

To discover that no "wonderful explanatory word" will rescue Mrs. Fullerton from those whose "community" has no room for her is the first step for the compassionate artist who decides not to argue but merely to show. Such is the conclusion Mary comes to as she realizes that not signing the petition has been an ineffectual gesture. ("There is nothing you can do at present but put your hands in your pockets and keep a disaffected heart.") Some day perhaps there will be a way to use words as more than labels for success, to strip of its pretensions a world where "Garden Place was already put down, in the minds of people who understood addresses, as less luxurious than Pine Hills but more desirable than Wellington Park." (D-23)

The child in "Walker Brothers Cowboy" feels that "even the dirty words chalked on the sidewalk" laugh at her. This is a crippling sensitivity, from which the writer must evidently disengage himself, for his task involves a taking up of the very challenge which Mary senses in "The Shining Houses": to find words which will rightly serve men in their desire to assert themselves as individuals. Alice Munro's "writers" — even those who, like Mary of "The Shining Houses," do not take up the pen — are given opportunities to learn from words, whether they be spoken, sung, or written. Del comes upon Fern Dogherty's pornographical cache and learns something about moderation.

> The greedy progression of verses, the short chunky words set in shameless type, fired up lust at a great rate, like squirts of kerosene on bonfires. But they were repetitive, elaborate; after a while the mechanical effort needed to contrive them began to be felt, and made them heavy going; they grew bewilderingly dull. (L - 167)

The children in "Walker Brothers Cowboy" hear their father cheat boredom with doggerel that attempts to transform dull reality. The singer's voice is "mournful-jolly, making . . . death some kind of nonsense, a comic calamity." (D-7) The small girl narrator has remembered the verse and registered its effect.

> Old Ned Fields, he now is dead,
> So I am ridin' the route instead.

On a more concrete level, the young woman of "The Peace of Utrecht" finds a notebook in which her own handwriting of ten years ago carries her back into the past where she can see what she was and what was the town that made her. Among the artifacts a person leaves behind him, written documents are perhaps the most personal, revealing the self since they have so much contributed to its growth. How much more true this will be of one's own ideas than of a factual detail entered into a notebook years ago.

Before Del Jordan can convincingly decide to take the plunge into writing her own novel, she has to make all kinds of attempts at interpreting people and events. In doing so, she discovers that words are transparent, that they are keys to attitudes and personalities. Her Uncle Bill's mannikin-like wife is immediately perceived as "an idiot," hardly human in her "perfect artificiality" and yet, in her very strangeness, extremely interesting, so that Del feels "grateful for every little colourless pebble of a word she dropped." When Nile ventures into polysyllables, however, Del can hardly believe she has heard right, suggesting that a person who has surrendered her identity to a mask is limited in the area of communication. To Nile's comment that "It's just a coincidence my name is Nile," Del adds parenthetically "She might even have said cocinidence." (L-87) Del's friend Naomi has long ceased to think of her religiously fanatic father as real and when she shrugs him off as "senile," Del notes that she "seemed to enjoy the clinical sound of that word." (L-185) Del is putting her finger on a relationship empty of all vitality and again recording this discovery with the word that has helped her see it for what it is. Like the child in the story "Images" who sums up her understanding of her father's side of the family with the observation that they would not allow anyone to be "sensitive," (D-35) Del grasps her mother's insecurities about sex in the tone she gives to the word "tortured" as she recounts a childhood experience. For the moment it is just an impression, but later on she verbalizes it. "Nothing really accounted for her darkened face at this point in the story, for her way of saying tortured. I had not yet learned to recognize the gloom that overcame her in the vicinity of sex." (L-77)

Always awake to the resonances of words, Del soon discovers that the artist can gain more and more control of them. When she makes a change in "Land of Hope and Glory" and her mother points out that the word is "extol" rather than "extore," she clings to her own intuition: "I would not believe that, for how would it rhyme?" (L-26) In another circumstance, Del plays on a word in order to exorcise the mixture of fear and disgust which a dead cow has provoked. "'Day-ud cow,' I said, expanding the word lusciously. 'Day-ud cow, day-ud cow.'" (L-44) These are childish attempts but they indicate an aptitude which may well serve the future writer. One is reminded of Stephen Dedalus as a child delighting in the sounds of verse.

> He said over to himself the song that Brigid had taught him . . . . How beautiful and sad that was! How beautiful the words were where they said Bury me in the old churchward! A tremor passed over his body. How sad and how beautiful! He wanted to cry quietly but not for himself: for the words, so beautiful and so sad, like music. The bell! The bell! Farewell! O farewell![4]

Throughout the novel Alice Munro shows her heroine as being alive to words, and exploring their possibilities in a conscious fashion. As is the case with Joyce's hero in Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, the reader recognizes that an important characteristic of the writer is present. It is significant here that in order to pursue her career as a writer, Del finds that she must reject Garnet French. One can wonder that she hesitates so long since, from the very beginning of their relationship, she notices his dislike for thinking, his distrust of words.

> He hated people using big words, talking about things outside of their own lives. He hated people trying to tie things together . . . . I would pay attention to the life of his instincts, never to his ideas . . . . Nothing that could be said by us would bring us together; words were our enemies. What we knew about each other was only going to be confused by them. (L - 22). (My underlining)

Garnet is an important part of Del's development, since she discovers her sexuality with him. She is joking when she calls him a Neanderthal or a Cro-Magnon (L-219), but in rejecting him, she marks herself off for a trade in which words are allies, not enemies.

2

Del is never indifferent to stories. Their building up is no idle task, for they are often a repository for fears, or a way of dealing with strange realities.

People live out stories, so that they star in gossip or legend, but they also fashion those in which other persons are given the spotlight. This basic notion that humanity provides the stuff of stories is suggested in a comparison Del uses while describing Uncle Craig's funeral. She says that "the house was full of people pressed together, melted together like blunt old crayons, warm, acquiescent, singing." (L-57) The figure is full of implications: that Del has been marked by all of these relatives to such an extent that she can never really escape them ("I was in the middle of them, in spite of being shut up here by myself"), and also that they will write out her myth, noting in this case, the sensational detail that she has "bitten Mary Agnes Oliphant's arm at Uncle Craig's funeral." But there is much more. If the people stand like "acquiescent" crayons, it is that they are accepting the common fate, recording in their own hearts through the example of Uncle Craig the fact of death and its inevitability. Elsewhere Del observes that stories about people of the past "go . . . round and round and down to death." (L-79) It is the prerogative of the artist to use the human "crayons" around him as they live out the stories of their lives.

As tools of the writer's art, people are by no means obedient or simple to manage. Del learns that their stories refuse to conform to type. In early conversations with her mother she does not yet know what the girl of "An Ounce of Cure" discovers so painfully: "the shameless, marvellous, shattering absurdity with which the plots of life, though not of fiction, are improvised." (D-88) Del would want to see more of a romantic element in her mother's life. When she is told that her mother was attracted to her father because he "was a gentleman," she sighs:

> Was that all? I was troubled here by a lack of proportion, though it was hard to say what was missing, what was wrong. In the beginning of her story was dark captivity, suffering, then daring and defiance and escape. Struggle, disappointment, more struggle, godmothers, and villains. Now I expected as in all momentous satisfying stories — the burst of Glory, the Reward. Marriage to my father? I hoped this was it. I wished she would leave me in no doubt about it. (L - 80)

This youthful desire for the satisfyingly predictable vanishes along with the capacity to be moved by vicarious adventure. Like the teen-ager of "Red Dress — 1946" Del hungers for experience of her own. "All the stories of my mother's life which had once interested me had begun to seem melodramatic, irrelevant, and tiresome." (D-149)

At the same time that Del is getting to know people through their stories, she is discovering that the audience must be taken into consideration. Those who "read" the lives of others will not long be satisfied with a mere reflection of themselves, as Del is when she interrupts her mother's story with a "'Were you sad?' I said hopefully." (L-77) They are more likely to become objective observers such as the one in "The Shining Houses."

> Mary found herself exploring her neighbour's life as she had once explored the lives of grandmothers and aunts — by pretending to know less than she did, asking for some story she had heard before; this way, remembered episodes emerged each time with slight differences of content, meaning, colour, yet with a pure reality that usually attaches to things which are at least part legend. (D-19)

The patience required to return to people for such renewed observation is a quality the writer must develop. He needs also to be aware of the difficulties involved in making meaningful revelations. In a poem called "What Happened," Margaret Atwood puts a finger on the shell that surrounds people in the present.

> No wires tender even as nerves
> can transmit the impact of
> our seasons, our catastrophes
> while we are closed inside them.
>
> We go for walks
> in the leaves, in the rising water, we
> tell stories, we communicate
> delayed reactions.[5]

As a child, Del is not aware of this and does not value the life around her. She goes no further than appearances, staying on the surface of her mother's stories and being disappointed that they lead only to the commonplace, the all-too-familiar. "Had all her stories, after all, to end up with just her, the way she was now, just my mother in Jubilee?"(L-80) That she evolves from this attitude into one which recognizes the mystery of the familiar and wishes to penetrate it is spelled out at the end of the novel when she realizes that nothing can be ignored of the life around her if she is to write a satisfactory novel.

Listening to Fern Dogherty and her mother, Del had sensed two different artistic styles with which to observe the fascinating and as yet hermetic adult world around her.

> Fern's talk was low, she would ramble and groan and laugh against my mother's sharper, more economical commentary. They told stories about people in the town, about themselves; their talk was a river that never dried up. It was the drama, the ferment of life just beyond my reach. (L-71)

Stories told by Del's slightly caustic but delightfully voluble aunts are not so much valuable in themselves as for the light they cast upon the narrators. Here it is not story for its own sake but a type of exercise in communion, two simple souls whiling away the present by escaping into the pleasurable past and enjoying the experience of recapturing it together. As Del listens to their duet renditions, she feels the joy which can be the artist's, independent even of the thrill of moving an audience.

> Aunt Elspeth and Auntie Grace told stories. It did not seem as if they were telling them to me, to entertain me, but as if they would have told them anyway, for their own pleasure, even if they had been alone. (L-33)

Rudy Wiebe, in discussing the "impulse to make story," says:

> For man, to make story is to entertain: the teller entertains himself as he entertains his listener. In other words, the emotional impulse to make story drives towards the principle of pleasure. At best, good story does what it does while pleasurably seducing both teller and listener out of their world into its own and, again at best, this seduction may both illuminate the world in which teller and listener actually are and often be the more pleasurable as the seduction becomes less immediate: story worth pondering is story doubly enjoyed.[6]

Del frequently finds that the style of the stories she hears makes them worth pondering. As active listener, she is awake to narrative stance as well as to story content and is thus gaining practical information about the art of story-telling. A precise account of the relationship between the story and the teller is given by the narrator of "The Peace of Utrecht." Once when Maddy's friend spends the evening, the two sisters offer him

> a present of our childhood, or of that version of our childhood which is safely preserved in anecdote, as in a kind of mental cellophane. And what fantasies we build around the frail figures of our child-selves so that they emerge beyond recognition incorrigible and gay. (D-193)

It is the same type of process Del observes in the tale about her mother's determined efforts to learn Latin. Younger classmates had laughed at the results, but in retrospect, Mrs. Jordan sees herself as a brave, victorious young girl.

> My mother could not help, could never help, being thrilled and tender, recalling this; she was full of wonder at her old, young self. Oh, if there could be a moment when we could choose to be judged, naked as can be, beleaguered, triumphant, than that would have to be the moment for her. Later on comes compromise and error, perhaps; there, she is absurd and unassailable. (L-78)

Story, then, is a privileged method of self-revelation, a way of setting up one's own identity in the eyes of both teller and listener. It is typical of someone like Clare in "The Postcard" that he refuses to tell stories about himself either because he is too superficial to gain anything from his experiences or because he is incapable of entering into meaningful relationships with the people around him. To perpetuate the image of himself as jolly good fellow, he stages bits of tasteless buffoonery that do more to underline the loneliness of the home he visits than any attractiveness in him. But he will not write letters to Helen when he goes off on holidays, professing that he has no idea what to write about or that it will be just as good to tell when he gets back. Apart from the utter selfishness this implies, there is also a lack of integrity and depth. A thoughtful man can only gain by reflecting upon his experience. Graham Greene uses as epigraph to his autobiography Kierkegaard's thought that "Only robbers and gypsies say that one must never return where one has once been."[6] Clare's refusal to account for himself foreshadows the crassness of his betrayal.

The young heroine of Lives of Girls and Women has none of this reluctance with regard to story. She is constantly revealing herself in accounts of her interaction with people as well as of situations she invents. She admits her daydreams, recognizing them for what they are. The rich girls of Jubilee are described in fairy-tale terms:

> beautiful, shining girls, whose names everybody knew — Margaret Bond, Dorothy Guest, Pat Mundy — and who in turn knew nobody's name, except if they choose; I watched them coming downhill from the High School, in their fur-trimmed velvet boots. They travelled in a little cluster, casting a radiance like a night-lantern, blinding them to the rest of the world. (L-70)

But Del does not allow herself to be overawed, at least in dreams. With the wand of her imagination, she transforms haughty "princesses" into benovolent humanitarians.

> One day one of them — Pat Mundy — had smiled at me in passing, and I made up daydreams about her — that she saved me from drowning, that she became a nurse and nursed me — risking her life rocking me in her velvet arms — when I nearly died of diphtheria.

Later on there is the even more satisfying adventure of entering with Miss Farris into the creation of the world of the Pied Piper, that artist who not only made song but used it to strike out against falsehood. Del is moved by this figure who keeps himself above earthly power and is very much alone. She describes him as "separate, and powerful, and helpless and tragic." Presenting him to Jubilee gives her the occasion to come to terms with many different realities. The fulfillment which accompanies the creative act is manifested in Miss Farris herself in whom "the hum . . . had got more noticeable." Del is infected with the fever, and when sent on an errand, says that she

> flew out in my unbuttoned coat and there was Jubilee under fresh snow, its silent, woolly white streets; the Town Hall stage behind me seemed bright as a bonfire, lit by such fanatical devotion. Devotion to the manufacture of what was not true, but more important, once belief had been granted to it, than anything else we had. (L-131)

Ordinary things appear silent and pale against the life of the spirit awakened by amateur theatricals. The whole experience brings new insights. Paradoxically, it is when Del sees Frank Wales acting the part of the Pied Piper that she sees "for the first time what he was like." She notices details about his appearance and conduct that had meant nothing before. Art and life take on new dimensions as Del feels herself being stimulated into a firmer identity. The girl who makes judgments about the appropriateness of the masks she sees around her is no longer the child who dreamed idly of being rescued from drowning or illness.

> Every day [Frank Wales] wore a blue-grey sweater, darned at the elbow, and this smoky colour, so ordinary, so reticent, and mysterious, seemed to me his colour, the colour of his self. (L-132)

Having seen new realities in the fiction and in the actor, she announces jubilantly: "I loved him. I loved the Pied Piper. I loved Frank Wales." The daydreams which follow this discovery have a very soothing quality. Now, against the white streets of Jubilee, Del is not alone.

> We walked through the absolutely silent streets of Jubilee, walked under the street lights with our shadows whirling and sinking on the snow, and there in the beautiful, dark, depopulated town Frank would surround me, either with real, implausible, but cool and tender, singing, or, in the more realistic versions of the dream, simply with the unheard music of his presence . . . . I would often invent this dream for myself at the edge of sleep, and then it was strange how content it would make me, how it would make peace and consolation flow, and I would float on it into my real dreams which were never so kind. (L-135)

This dream conjured up to achieve a precise effect allows Del to be scenarist and audience, both roles being assumed very consciously.

Neither daydream nor joke are adequate to contain the crucial insight produced by the experience with Mr. Chamberlain. As Del reflects upon this experience, she unwittingly functions as writer, for she extracts significance from event.

> I had not the relief of making what Mr. Chamberlain had done into a funny, though horrifying, story. I did not know what to do with it. I could not get him back to his old role, I could not make him play the single-minded, simple-minded, vigorous, obliging lecher of my daydreams. My faith in simple depravity had weakened. Perhaps nowhere but in daydreams did the trapdoor open so sweetly and easily, plunging bodies altogether free of thought, free of personality, into self-indulgence, made bad licence. Instead of that, Mr. Chamberlain had shown me, people take along a good deal — flesh that is not overcome but has to be thumped into ecstasy, all the stubborn puzzle and dark turns of themselves. (L-173)

Del wants to do more than share her new-found knowledge; she would like to be able to exorcise it by joking about it. The evil "attendant," Mr. Chamberlain, has jarred her into a new awareness about sexual indulgence which seems too much to bear alone or undiluted. However, it is clear from the passage just quoted that she has in fact preserved the lesson in a formal "story," for she sums up the illusions she must discard and formulates the conclusions she has drawn. This is story in the original Greek sense, i. e. a record of what is known. For a change in attitude towards the same subject, one can turn to an earlier portion of the book in which Aunt Moira tells the two aunts about her town. To Del, it is a picture of faraway evil, curiously fascinating. Her naïve interest in "Porterfield, that depraved sullen town, filled with untrustworthy, gangsterish people" (L-43) may indicate a healthy curiosity but as yet it has yielded only confused notions. Now, with the Mr. Chamberlain episode, she has firsthand information. And she busies herself with a more challenging task than the weaving of daydreams.

The first chapter of Lives of Girls and Women shows Del's predisposition to become a writer in the way in which she reacts to Uncle Benny's stories. Along with her mother, she rejects the sensational content of many of these tales, but she notes with appreciation Benny's ability to show to others the world of his imagination. Although the material fascinates her, she questions its veracity, and is able to keep Benny's fictions in focus. When he tells her she can bring his yellow journals home, she comments with much good sense and a fine intuition about levels of reality:

> I knew better than to do that. I read faster and faster, all I could hold, then reeled out into the sun, onto the path that led to our place, across the fields. I was bloated and giddy with revelations of evil, of its versatility and grand invention and horrific playfulness. But the nearer I got to our house the more this vision faded. Why was it that the plain back wall of home, the pale chipped brick, the cement platform outside the kitchen door, washtubs hanging on nails, the pump, the lilac bush with brown-spotted leaves, should make it seem doubtful that a woman would really send her husband's torso, wrapped in Christmas paper, by mail to his girl friend in South Carolina? (L-5)

However, with the coming of Uncle Benny's strange young wife Madeleine, real horror bursts upon the Flats Road. The brutality to which little Diane is subjected can no more be dismissed as a vision than can the stove-lid with which Del is menaced. All this violence is so real that it must be enshrined, and after Madeleine has disappeared, Del says, "We remembered her like a story." (L-27) This is no relegation. Rather, Del is achieving a Pirandello-like effect, described by Esslin in these terms:

> The participants are to be made aware of the shifting ground on which they stand — that reality may be illusion, illusion reality, and that the world itself is a vast stage on which illusion merges into reality, which in turn may reveal itself as just another layer of illusions.

Whether the writer be Pirandello or a young girl, secure among what she knows, his business is to grapple with illusions and realities.

> Lying alongside our world was Uncle Benny's world like a troubling distorted reflection, the same but never at all the same. In that world people could go down in quicksand, be vanquished by ghosts or terrible ordinary cities; luck and wickedness were gigantic and unpredictable; nothing was deserved, anything might happen; defeats were met with crazy satisfaction. It was his triumph, that he couldn't know about, to make us see. (L-25)

As Del enters into Benny's imaginative adventures and especially his futile meanderings in Toronto, she reveals her own imaginative capacity. From admiring Benny to imitating him, there will be but a step for her.

3

Books are Del Jordan's first love. She is familiar with a number of literary figures, and frequently uses comparisons from books to speak about her own life situations. One of the reasons she is happy to have moved into town is that she has easier access to the Library. Unlike most Jubilee girls, she retains her love for reading beyond early adolescence. One of the main points of contention between Jerry Storey and Del involves this love of books. Jerry is the factual, scientific boy, incapable of recognizing that there is poetry in the visions of the future which his own reading and thinking have brought him. His scorn for Del's interest in fiction leaves her unmoved only because she realizes that the limitation is in him rather than in her. In no way is Jubilee favourable to the fostering of literary interests or talents. At school the children copy information from the board, and it is a novelty to have Mr. Boyce, the part-time music teacher, ask questions which are not "factual, proper." (L-121) The town librarian who is deaf and lame has been given her position "because she could never have managed a proper job." (L-118)

Sometimes it is for refuge that Del turns to books, as in her reading of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* after the disastrous outing at the Gay-la dance hall. (L-194) But she has always felt comfortable in the company of books, her fascination extending to very concrete elements. "I loved the volumes of the encyclopedia, their weight (of mystery, of beautiful information) . . . I loved their sedate dark green binding, the spidery, reticent-looking golden letters on their spines." (L-66) From such "lovely, wistful, shabby old friends" (L-118) as *The Winning of Barbara Worth* and *The Prince of the House of David*, Del graduates to books that give her a picture of modern life. But she evidently prefers Thomas Wolfe to the more superficial treatments of Somerset Maugham and Nancy Mitford. It is when Jerry challenges her taste for the type of literature represented by *Look Homeward, Angel* that her reaction indicates how precious it is to her, as though a misunderstanding of it were a threat to her own person. She feels "baffled and depressed" (L-201) at her inability to account to Jerry for something that stirs her so profoundly and helps her understand human life.

4

Del's decision to produce a novel of her own ("I saw that the only thing to do with my life was to write a novel") (L-244) is expressed as an instinctive compulsion. Writing appears to her the best method by which to grasp experience. This is Alice Munro's own idea, of course. She has told Graeme Gibson: "I just experience things finally when I . . . get them into words."[9]

The "novel" about the Sherriff family which Del sketches in the last chapter of *Lives of Girls and Women* is not a strict record of "facts".

Like a play-within-a-play it is purposely awkward and artificial, its inflated style betraying an amateurish striving for effect. What it does, however, is to reveal Del's groping for the unexpressed in the lives of the people around her. Somehow, she wants to get at the "unfathomable," the "deep caves paved with kitchen linoleum." (L-253) The two levels of reality one finds in comparing Del's "novel" with the real one of which it is a part bring up the question which Joyce Carol Oates sees at the heart of every literary work. Each one, she says, is "a hypothetical statement about reality — a kind of massive, joyful experiment done with words, and submitted to one's peers for judgment."[10] Just as the strange "photographer" who appears in Del's novel reveals to his subjects aspects of themselves which are invisible, so the realistic writer may by his stylization of life illuminate it for his readers. His question is "Are you sure you are seeing everything?" or "How does my picture compare with yours?" One must be humble to ask such questions, but the novelist, as W. H. Auden has so well put it in his sonnet, is used to a background position, for he

> Must struggle out his boyish gift and learn
> How to be plain and awkward, How to be
> One after whom none think it worth to turn.
>
> For, to achieve his lightest wish, he must
> Become the whole of boredom, subject to
> Vulgar complaints like love, among the Just
>
> Be just, among the Filthy filthy too,
> And in his own weak person, if he can,
> Must suffer dully all the wrongs of Man.[11]

Auden's requirements are fulfilled in Del. With her immense curiosity and her intuition that the life about her is worthy of attention, Del can set out not only to share her vision but to sharpen it. Indeed, one can only agree with Margaret Atwood who has found her such a good embodiment of the novelist. She is the best to appear in Canadian literature. "She is a functioning artist, and she is plausible."[12]

FOOTNOTES

Chapter I. The Girl

[1] Alice Munro, *Dance of the Happy Shades* (Toronto, 1968), p. 119. All subsequent references from this volume will be acknowledged within the text, indicating page number and the abbreviation D.

[2] Alice Munro, *Lives of Girls and Women* (Toronto, 1971), p. 176. References from this volume will be dealt with as above — using the abbreviation L.

[3] Alice Munro, "Great Dames," Interview with Barbara Frum in *Maclean's*, Volume 86, No. 4, 38.

[4] *The Second Sex* (New York, 1971), pp. 286 - 87.

[5] Ibid., p. 287.

[6] Ibid., p. 451.

[7] Ibid., p. 598.

[8] Ibid., p. 452.

[9] *The Feminine Mystique* (New York, 1963), p. 308.

[10] New York, 1964, p. 228.

[11] Chapter 15 of D. H. Monro's *Argument of Laughter* (Melbourne, 1951) offers an interesting discussion of laughter as release from restraint. Much of it applies to Del Jordan whose jokes with Naomi (see particularly L-148) are defiant of authority and sexually aggressive.

[12] Martha Vicinus, ed., *Suffer and Be Still* (Bloomington, 1972), p.iv.

[13] Alice Munro, Interview with Graeme Gibson in *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto, 1973), p. 261.

Chapter II. The Believer

[1] Sigrid Undset, Kristin Lavransdatter, I, trans. Charles Archer and J. S. Scott (New York, 1946), 29.

[2] Ibid., 31.

[3] Ibid., 33.

[4] Ibid., 69.

[5] Ibid., 121.

[6] Ibid., 94.

[7] Ibid., 142.

[8] Ibid., 260.

[9] Sigrid Undset (New York, 1970), p. 102.

[10] Six Scandinavian Novelists (Princeton, 1940), p. 316.

[11] B. J. Rogers, "The Divine Disappointment of Kristin Lavransdatter," Cithara II, No. 1, 47.

[12] Oscar Williams, ed., The Pocket Book of Modern Verse (New York, 1954, p. 282.

[13] Ibid., p. 279.

[14] Quoted by A. T. Padovano, The Estranged God (New York, 1966), p. 20.

[15] The Death of God (New York, 1961), p. 56.

[16] What a Modern Catholic Believes About God (Chicago, 1971), p. 11.

[17] Vahanian, p. 146.

[18] Ibid., p. 4.

[19] "Deep Caves and Kitchen Linoleum," Canadian Literature, Autumn 1972, No. 54, p. 103.

[20] God's Way With Man (London, 1969), p. 23.

[21] Samuel L. Clemens (Mark Twain), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (New York, 1929), p. 16.

[22] Does Civilization Need Religion (New York, 1928), p. 185.

Chapter III. The Writer

[1] Quoted by Margaret Atwood in *Survival* (Toronto, 1972), p. 246.

[2] *Masks of Fiction* (Toronto, 1961), p. 24.

[3] James Joyce, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York, 1928), p. 193.

[4] Ibid., p. 22.

[5] Margaret Atwood, *The Animals in That Country*, (Toronto, 1968), p. 27.

[6] *The Story-Makers* (Toronto, 1970), p. ix.

[7] *A Sort of Life* (London, 1971), p. iii.

[8] *Reflections: Essays on Modern Theatre* (New York, 1969), p. 57.

[9] *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto, 1973), p. 244.

[10] "The Myth of the Isolated Artist," *Psychology Today*, May, 1973, 74.

[11] *The Collected Poetry of W. H. Auden* (New York, 1945), p. 39.

[12] *Survival*, p. 193.

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Entries preceded by an asterisk refer to books mentioned by name in *Lives of Girls and Women.*